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Nations and Nationalism in Layamon's *Brut*

by

Matthew William Griener

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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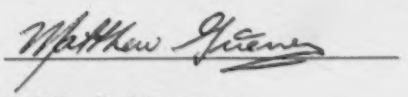

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Nations and Nationalism in Layamon's Brut" submitted by Matthew William Griener in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

My thesis participates in a growing body of work examining the links between theories of nationalism and medieval studies. Studies of the rhetorical and discursive practices of modern nationalism have read nationalism as an exclusively modern phenomenon and have understood the Middle Ages as pre-nationalist, defined instead by relations of personal loyalty and religious solidarity. This thesis begins by challenging that conception and argues that Layamon's *Brut*, a poem dating to the late-twelfth or early-thirteenth century, represents social and cultural groupings in terms clearly evocative of nationalist rhetoric. The second chapter of the thesis examines the exchanges between religious and secular authority that constitute Layamon's representation of the medieval nation. The third chapter studies the emergence of the English nation in the poem's final stages. In discussing this representation, I propose a distinction between a history of nations and a nationalist history, arguing that the *Brut* falls in the first category.

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List of Abbreviations

EETS	Early English Text Society (o.s. = old series)
HRB	*Historia regum Brittaniae*
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
ModE	Modern English
SATF	Societé des Anciens Textes Français

Introduction

This project was initially conceived as an exploration into the prophecy recorded in line 14297 of the Caligula manuscript of Layamon's *Brut*: "an Arður scule ȝete cum Anglen to fulste" ("an Arthur shall yet come to help the English"). This line seems enormously suggestive of the ambivalent relationship between the English and Britons in the poem. We may read in it an English claim to King Arthur, the epitome of British achievement, an effort to make him an English hero, but that the line merely expresses hope in a future English king analogous to the British Arthur seems equally probable. Add to these possibilities the fact that the Otho manuscript reads "Bruttes" for Anglen, and we discover the strong resistance to neat critical readings characteristic of the *Brut* as a whole. Where it was once commonly assumed that Layamon wrote on behalf of an oppressed native English population, producing a history that casts the recently arrived Normans as an aberration, more recent work has uncovered the ambiguous relationships between cultural groups in Layamon's day. Josh Gillingham detects a shift in the application of the label "English" in twelfth-century historians, notably Henry of Huntingdon. No longer used "in the sense of an inferior monolingual class of natives," it comes to refer to "those bi- or trilingual members of the elite whose own careers and interests were substantially shaped in England" (84). Elizabeth Salter notes a similar pattern in Anglo-Norman literary production: "the great *Historia Regum Brittaniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the vernacular *Chronicles* of Geoffrey Gaimar and of Wace confirmed the desire of the Normans to enter into their new inheritance, rather than to advertise their role as continental conquerors" (6). Cultural tastes in post-

Conquest England approved equally of all "the varied subject matter of England's earlier centuries—whether Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian or Celtic, and whether drawn from chronicle, legend or saga" (Salter 6). Stable and antagonistic cultural categories—Anglo-Saxon, Norman, and Welsh—can no longer plausibly underwrite an examination of a text like the *Brut*.

As we have seen in the brief example given above, Layamon's text inherits much of this cultural confusion and hybridity. Working through the competing cultural politics of an English poet who is translating a French text on a primarily British subject, I oriented this study towards the formation, evolution, and occasional withdrawal or disappearance of cultural groups. In essence, I have chosen to read the *Brut* as a national history, and in so doing, I stumbled onto the most contentious questions in *Brut*-scholarship. Can we legitimately read Layamon as an English poet? What would it mean to do so? Why would an English poet write a poem so profoundly pro-British, largely at the expense of the Saxons? How can we speak of nationalism in the early thirteenth century? What his Layamon's picture of history? How does his being a priest shape that picture?

The structure of this thesis was shaped in response to these questions. The first chapter takes up the problem of naming the large cultural groups at work in the *Brut*. While Benedict Anderson's influential study, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1991), identifies nations and nationalism as purely modern phenomena, a body of work is emerging within medieval studies to challenge this prevalent conception. With an eye to this work, my first chapter examines the opening movement of the *Brut*, reading the formation of the Britons as the poem's paradigmatic

nation. My contention will be that contemporary theoretical investigations of nationalism has produced a set of terms well suited to the form and dynamics of Layamon's polities. Layamon's picture of the emergence of a British nation from assembled groups of Trojan exiles encourages us to stretch Anderson's category of imagined communities beyond the chronological and technological limits he imposes. This exercise also uncovers the instabilities inherent in the representation of the nation, and I explore Layamon's efforts to sustain the integrity of the Britons, through their difference from other peoples, in the face of the continual eruption of inter-national resemblance.

The assumption that nations exist in some premodern form also challenges Anderson's assumption that nationalism emerges only with the decline of religious sensibilities. My second chapter addresses the importance of the Christian Church as a universalizing structure in opposition to the project of monologic nationalism. The mission of Dunian and Fagan, which brings about the conversion of the Britons roughly one third of the way through the text, introduces a Christian-heathen binary. This opposition guides the text until well after the mortally-wounded Arthur's retreat to Avalon, but it circulates as a structure separate from national polities and never completely maps onto the Briton-outsider binary. The relationship between these two guiding forces appears in the text in the exchanges between secular and ecclesiastical authority. Points of contact are established between Rome-centred Christian evangelism and various Insular nationalisms, and tension arising at these points is never fully resolved. In unearthing these tensions, I situate the poem in the context of the Investiture Contest. Although the conflict itself took place a century and a half before the *Brut*'s

likely date of composition, its repercussions could still be felt well into the modern period. The martyrdom of Thomas Becket, almost certainly within Layamon's lifetime, continued to have political effect down to Henry VIII's destruction of Becket's shrine, making the Church-State conflicts particularly charged in the English context.

Finally, my third chapter applies the results of these earlier explorations to the roughly fifteen hundred lines of the poem's closing action where Layamon stages the emergence of the English. The English cut a perplexing figure in the *Brut*, and they have drawn the attention of a number of critics. Questions of Layamon's own "Englishness" are thoroughly addressed elsewhere (although they are certainly not resolved), and I have set them aside here. Instead, my focus remains on what is immediately accessible, the representation of nations in the poem itself. Like all nations in the *Brut*, this new people, a people deeply connected to their Saxon forerunners yet somehow distinct from that heritage at the same time, gains its form through its contacts with other peoples. However, the conversion of the English complicated the narrative's sympathies, rendering impossible the vehement preservation of coherent nations that dominates earlier passages of the *Brut*. Many critics have found the final section of the *Brut*, beginning with Arthur's retreat to Avalon, unsatisfactory, perhaps owing to its refusal to be resolved in terms of such neat models as Fortune's Wheel or providential design. Ultimately, I find myself in agreement with Lesley Johnson's assessment that Layamon never offers "a lesson about how the passage of dominion between national groupings is to be interpreted" ("Reading" 158). Layamon's text displays a greater approval for the English ascendance than do Wace or Geoffrey, but this is tempered by his sorrow for the loss of British glory. These ambivalent sympathies influence his representation of the

emergence of the English in terms of shifting allegiances and contingent national affiliations.

Before beginning, a few notes on my theoretical and methodological assumptions are in order. Throughout, I have employed a practice of close reading, comparing the Caligula text of Layamon's *Brut* with Wace's *Roman de Brut*, as edited by Ivor Arnold (1938), and referencing analogous passages in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Brittaniae*. Despite Layamon's claim to multiple sources, including an Anglo-Saxon translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and a much-debated Latin text attributed to "Seinte Albin / and þe feire Austin" (17-18), the *Brut* is obviously a "fairly faithful translation" (Le Saux, *Sources* 24) of Wace. Following this observation, I have generally followed the critical tendency to assume a hierarchy of significance within the *Brut*, privileging the points of difference between Layamon and Wace. This strategy allows us to isolate Layamon's innovations, which likely offer a clearer picture of his own motivations; at the same time, his decision not to tamper with the bulk of the narrative is not without meaning. I have not treated the tension between innovation and conservation explicitly in the body of my argument, but it lies implicit in my reading. This tension may reflect the working assumptions of a typical medieval translator. Jeanette Beer describes the relationship in terms of the translator's clear supremacy over the author of the source-text. Reflecting on the lack of theoretical manuals on the practice of translation or even significant glosses within the translations themselves, she argues that "The medieval translator required no arguments to justify either his authority or his activities" (2). However, she also acknowledges that "the activity of translation was necessarily more than 'inventio'" (5), suggesting that the source always exerted great

pressure on the resulting text. Layamon's *Brut* is typical in reflecting the culture of the author and his audience while preserving much of substance of the Anglo-Norman source.

Both legendary and literal histories of Britain are replete with scenes of cultural contact and fantasies of empire, yet critics are only beginning to exploit these intersections between medieval and postcolonial studies. Michelle R. Warren's work on Geoffrey's *Historia,* her attempt to read that text through "the dynamics of edges--the literal and figural boundaries between spaces, peoples, languages, and times" (116), provides one example for such an investigation.[1] She argues against postcolonial studies' "boundary limits this side of the Middle Ages," suggesting instead that the postcolonial "opens into any time or place where one social group dominates another" (115). At the same time, she acknowledges (as must we) the danger of speaking of *the* postcolonial. Postcolonial theorists very deliberately orient their writings towards the specifics of their historical moment, and so "the postcolonial" designates, in fact, "a kaleidoscope of contentious fragments," sharing only "anxieties about coercive cultural encounters" (Warren 116). Given the inadvanced state of research into the historical conditions of the *Brut*'s production, "[i]t is not easy . . . to re-create the receptive context" of the *Brut* (Johnson and Wogan-Browne 97). Despite this handicap, we can find, in the poem, insistent questions concerning the formation and evolution of nations through the production of a shared history of cultural contact and conflict. Celebrating and defending the transformation of a group of Trojan exiles into a nation of Britons, yet unable to endorse so whole-heartedly the transformation of a group of Saxon migrants into an English nation, Layamon's *Brut* is a profoundly ambivalent work.

The *Brut* and Medieval Nationalism

Layamon's *Brut*, an English translation of a French translation of a Latin text that itself claims to be a translation of "a certain very ancient book written in the British language" (*HRB* 51), owes its existence to the kinds of cultural and linguistic exchanges that animate the bulk of its narrative. In other words, it offers the Holy Grail of literary study, the form that enacts its content. The history of the *Brut*'s critical reception, however, reminds us that caution is imperative to a discussion of cultural relations in Layamon's time and work, lest we cast "Laȝamon as a kind of resistance fighter against the linguistic invasions of the French language, which becomes the equivalent of seeing him as the defender of a national literature" (Donoghue 557). In such a critical history, the *Brut* has often circulated as a screen for the projection of modern nationalist projects, evidence of an English racial inheritance "darker, graver, more wintry" (Lewis, "Genesis" 26) than can be found in the romance tradition imported by the Normans. Such a history, combined with influential studies of modern nationalism, have led many critics, more recently, to dismiss any claims of nationalism in the *Brut*, or, for that matter, any other medieval texts. But those categories that have been suggested as replacements—race, ethnicity, or a pan-European culture of Christendom—do not adequately capture the complexity of cultural relations in the *Brut*. In this first chapter, I aim to establish a critical terminology for this study, negotiating the critical baggage attendant, in particular, on race and nation. If we keep an eye on these critical histories and the pitfalls to which they alert us, postcolonial theories of nationalism that stress the

discursive processes through which the nation is produced will provide a helpful way into the exchanges motivating Layamon's interpretation of the *Hystoria Brutonum*.

In a study of the circulation of cultural groups in the *Brut*, it would be irresponsible not to be explicit, early in the discussion, about my terminology. While much of the recent *Brut* criticism is concerned with these groups--chiefly the Britons, Romans, Saxons and English--the question of an appropriate generic label has critics deeply divided. Daniel Donoghue's 1990 article, "Laȝamon's Ambivalence," polarized the debate with its insistence that the *Brut*'s large groups "are defined not by nation but by race" (537). Donoghue's essay militates against a reading he attributes to "a generation of scholars primarily from the first half of this century" (557): Layamon's use of the English language and an English poetic tradition to vilify the Saxon invaders produces a tension best resolved "under the unifying claims of nationalism" (Donoghue 537). I will discuss Donoghue's argument more thoroughly below; for now, its primary interest lies in his influential presentation of "race" and "nation" as opposed terms. Critics writing after Donoghue, whether supporting or dismissing his ambivalence hypothesis, have readily endorsed this binary. While a third term, "ethnicity," seems to circulate as a shorthand designation for the race/nation debate—an attempt to acknowledge the issue without engaging in it—its appeal as a way around these thorny questions is illusory. Werner Sollors's discussion of "ethnicity" as a category in social thought, in Lentricchia and McLaughlin's *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, suggests that the promotion and study of ethnicity depended heavily on nineteenth-century nationalist projects (289). At the same time, the word itself surfaced in England during World War II as a euphemism for race, "in the name of which the National Socialists shaped their

genocidal policies" (289). Deeply implicated in the emergence of modern nationalism, "ethnicity" nonetheless gestures toward a discourse of race. It lacks the precision to sustain a study, leaving us to choose from between "race" and "nation."

In the same collection as Sollors's essay on ethnicity, Kwame Anthony Appiah traces the development of race and racialist thinking, starting from the universal existence of "more or less well articulated views about the differences between 'our own kind' and the people of other cultures" (274). Appiah draws a distinction between systems of thought predicated on a loose awareness of "peoples" and a specifically Victorian and post-Victorian formulation of the races--a formulation he terms "racialism" (276)--understood "in such a way that all the members of these races shared certain fundamental, biologically heritable, moral and intellectual characteristics with each other that they did not share with members of any other race" (276). Appiah reveals the not surprising connection between nineteenth-century racialist theories and contemporary nationalist projects. Where eighteenth-century political theory established a distinction "between the nation as a natural entity and the state as the product of . . . human artifice," nineteenth-century science increasingly studied this "natural entity" in terms of biological descent, of race (282). Among English historians of nation and of literature, the natural entity emerged in the form of Anglo-Saxonism, the myth "of a free Anglo-Saxon people living under parliamentary government in the period before the Norman conquest of 1066" (283). This brief genealogy suggests that, at best, a discourse of race is no more appropriate to the Middle Ages than one of nationalism, and, at worst, its use in this context obscures the dependence of race on modern nationalist projects.

After vehemently arguing that Layamon conceives of cultural groups as races rather than nations, Donoghue further complicates matters, near the end of his essay, with a problematic definition of race: "I do not mean a narrow definition simply based on birth but one that adds to it a cluster of associations that include language, social structures, and a common myth of origin" (560). The supposed "great distance" between this definition and Benedict Anderson's characterization of a nation as "an imagined political community--and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6) is by no means clear. And Donoghue's efforts to distinguish them fail to convince: he writes that the prominence of the Anglo-Saxon migration in Anglo-Saxon historiography "distinguishes their identity as a people from that of a modern nation" (560), but origin myths are by no means uncommon in modern nations. The production and promotion of Jacques Cartier as a Canadian national hero, or the American mythology surrounding Columbus, the *Mayflower* and the Pilgrim Fathers seem driven by the same impulse. Still, if Donoghue is mistaken in rejecting "nation" as a valid category, in doing so he alerts us to the problematic history of nation and nationalism. Donoghue seems to have in mind, when discussing the nation, the tendency of earlier critics to equate "La3amon's sense of Englishness" with their own early twentieth-century English nationalism (557). Certainly, Layamon cannot legitimately be read "as a poet of the [modern] English nation" (557), but this should not preclude any consideration whatsoever of nationalist modes of thought in the *Brut*. In exploring manifestations of nationalism other than the modern Western variety, we can fruitfully discuss Layamon's *Brut* as a history of nations.

Benedict Anderson's 1983 *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* remains the foundational text in contemporary studies of

nationalism, but its influence has proven problematic for medievalist historians and literary critics. Lesley Johnson's frustration is evident in her claim that Anderson "overstates the homogeneity of medieval clerical culture, overestimates the cultural monopoly of 'sacred languages,' . . . and grossly oversimplifies world views in circulation in medieval culture" ("Imagining" 5). Anderson's definition of nations, quoted above, deserves much of its positive reception, because it enables the study of nationalism and of particular nations as "cultural artefacts [sic]" (4). The principal distinction between nationalism and other modes of being-in-community lies "not [in] their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6). By defining the nation as an "imagined political community" (6), Anderson navigates a series of paradoxes that emerge when critical pressure is applied to nationalism. The first of these is particularly relevant here: "The objective modernity of nations in the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists" (5). Anderson theorizes nations and nationalism as essentially modern phenomena, products of the eighteenth century that were enabled by the "interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity" (42-3). But is "nation-ness" (Anderson 4) so completely new? John A. Armstrong argues the contrary position, in *Nations and Nationalism* (1982): "an exceptionally strong rejection of ethnic differentiation" (4) characterizes the intellectual culture of the seventeenth century. Many historians of nationalism have taken this movement to be characteristic of all forms of identification before the eighteenth century. In fact, we do find "widespread intense ethnic identification" (Armstrong 4) in these earlier periods of the sort commonly associated with nationalism.

While Anderson is innocent of imagining nationalism as the spontaneous eruption in the eighteenth century of never before seen massive common identification, his picture of nationalism's precursors, the "religious community" and "dynastic realm" (12), is inadequate. Anderson's account of the "large cultural systems" (12) characteristic of medieval Christian and Islamic civilizations depends on what Lesley Johnson calls "a highly mythicised version of the past" ("Imagining" 4). Central to his sense of the history and forms of cultural identification are language and the changing technologies of the written word; where print culture enables nationalism, pre-nationalist religious communities, Anderson argues, were crucially dependent on a single "sacred language and written script" (13). This emphasis on a sacred language suggests to Anderson "an idea largely foreign to the contemporary Western mind: the non-arbitrariness of the sign" (14). But, as Kathleen Davis asserts, "the problematic relation of 'fallen,' arbitrary language to the possibility of human understanding and to the mediation of God's Word was a driving question of medieval semiotic and philosophical thought" (617). Anderson's picture of the dynastic realm is somewhat more helpful, but it too depends on unsophisticated and unexplored binaries to set off the medieval from the modern and foreclose on the question of medieval nationalism. Anderson characterizes dynastic cultures as "centripetal and hierarchical" rather than "boundary-oriented and horizontal" (13). Applying this spatial language to the *Brut*, however, we certainly do find a centripetal, king-centred impulse, but this impulse is tied to an awareness of the bounded territory of the British or English nations. Such an awareness reflects the tendency Armstrong identifies "to replace designations indicating rule over

people by terms suggesting territorial domination" (37), an originally Frankish movement that begins in eighth-century biography and flourishes in eleventh-century epic.

Far from giving cause to reject Anderson's work entirely, the objections raised here permit us to make greater use of his strengths. While his presentation of medieval history is simplistic, it does encourage us to distance nationalism from the field of "self-consciously held political ideologies" (12), such as Marxism or liberalism. Like association to a religious community or dynastic realm, nationalism, on Anderson's reading, is not primarily a matter of intellectual assent to a set of doctrines but of emotional (or, in a Marxist register, pathological) attachment. While we must preserve this important distinction, an analysis of nationalism in either medieval or modern eras is hindered by the opposition that Anderson, and many other critics, produces between the modern and medieval. Indeed, I deny neither that religious communities and dynastic realms existed, nor that people identified with them; rather, the exchange between these modes of identification—the subject of my second chapter—profoundly marks medieval nationalism.

Kathleen Davis offers a critique both of Anderson and of those medievalists who, following his argument, have dismissed all claims of medieval nationalism as wishful thinking. Her essay on Alfred's *Preface* to the *Pastoral Care*, "National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking about the Nation" (1998), confronts a problem almost identical to that which led Daniel Donoghue to reject the possibility of Layamon's nationalism. An earlier generation of literary critics and historians—writing during "the period of philological nationalism in which Old English

texts were institutionalized" (Davis 611)—attempted to produce Alfred as the self-conscious starting point in the development of the nineteenth-century English nation. And yet, she asks,

> Is it the case . . . that if we acknowledge this modern historicism, which claimed early medieval texts such as Alfred's to "father" a teleologically developing modern nation, then we must also assert that these texts *must* precede the idea of the nation altogether? (612)

Davis's critique of Anderson strikes deeper than the mere charge that his presentation of the Middle Ages is historically inaccurate. Given this inaccuracy--which, she argues, "has gained easy acceptance in contemporary nation studies" (617)--Anderson cannot effectively critique nationalism because he is complicit in the modern nation's project to produce "its identity over and against its own historiographical construction of the Middle Ages, which served as its temporal Other" (628). In the construction of a pre-national medieval period, Davis identifies another paradox to add to Anderson's three: the "progressivist logic" of the modern nation attempts to claim the Middle Ages "as *both* a primitive or infant stage incapable of thinking the mature nation, *and* as the source, or origin, of the nation-people's essential characteristics" (613; original emphasis). In the face of this progressivist logic, the task of medieval studies is to uncover the Middle Ages as a contested field occupied at various times in various places by competing ideological and cultural programs. While this project is certainly vulnerable to Donoghue's accusation that we run "the risk of projecting anachronistic modern political ideals on the medieval past" (556), the uncovering of medieval processes of nation-building and the recovery of a sense of the Middle Ages' competing discourses enable more accurate

readings than a retreat into superficially safer, more stable categories such as race or ethnicity.

Moving from the general field of medieval studies to the particular case of Layamon's *Brut*, we may be disappointed, if not surprised, to find that Layamon does not do us the favour of discussing different peoples in terms of "nation," "race," or "ethnicity." Of course, neither were any of the three available for him consciously to reject. Where the *Brut* refers to broad social groupings, it generally relies on one of *folc* or *leoden*. *Folc* is readily understood by its similarity to ModE "folk" or German *Volk* 'people,' and beyond its twentieth-century political implications it presents relatively little difficulty, or, accordingly, interest. In contrast, *leoden* has disappeared, so I turn first to the *MED*, which offers three definitions:

> 1. (a) A person, a man; (b) in pl.: subjects, followers, retainers; an army; sg.: servant; as form of address to an inferior: "My man"; (c) a prince, lord; God; as form of address: sir; (d) ?a lady; (e) the human race, mankind; also, one of the human race, a human being . . .
> 2. (a) A people, nation . . .; (b) a race, kind, group; [(c) lists various related compound nouns]
> 3. Land, landed property, landholdings.

Because the *Brut* is a substantial work at a very early date in Middle English literature, we should not be surprised to find it cited repeatedly among the examples listed; the dictionary cites Layamon six times for 2a, twenty-eight for the compounds given in 2c, and once for 3.[2] Very early in the poem we get a sense of the word's semantic richness. Weinberg and Barron translate the poem's opening line, "An preost wes on leoden, Laȝamon was ihoten" (1), as "There was a priest in the land who was called Laȝamon," while Donald Bzdyl's translation reads, "A priest . . . lived among the people" (33). The phrase, which occurs again at l. 36 ("Þe wes on leoden preost"), designates Layamon as a

parish priest; *leoden*, like the modern "parish," denotes both the physical area of the parish and its inhabitants. Again in the prologue, we are told that Layamon travelled "wide ȝond þas leode" ("throughout the land"; 14).[3] We cannot know with certainty exactly how far he traveled, though it seems likely he made it at least as far as Worcester Cathedral, but *leode* clearly signals the physical space of his travels. In contrast, the poem proper opens with an account of how the Greeks "þat lond iwest and þa leoden ofslawen" ("ravaged the land and slaughtered the people"; 39). *Leoden*, because of the juxtaposition with "lond," clearly denotes only the people themselves, distinct from the *lond* (as does the fact that a territory cannot be slaughtered). The fluidity of *leoden* produces a sense of connection between the people and the land, a connection extensively developed by the poem's treatment of the Britons and English. The only term in contemporary theoretical discourse that carries this same weight is "nation."

While the treatment of the Saxons and the English is a fascinating aspect of the *Brut*, the fact remains that despite Layamon's promise to tell "of Engle þa æðelæn" ("the noble origins of the English"; 7), the British are his principal subject matter. In Chapter Three, I will take up the "noble origins" of the English in the *Brut*, but at present my concern is best served by focusing on the development of the Britons. Layamon's sense of nation-ness, to borrow Anderson's term, and the kind of social relationships that this entails emerges first in his treatment of the Britons. Plotting that emergence through the *Brut*'s opening movement, we find two relationships central to the coherence of the *Bruttisc* nation: the exiled Trojans' taking possession of the island Albion/Britain and their taking Brutus for king. These two processes are not easily separated, as the passage from Albion to Britain and Trojan to Briton reflects:

Þis lond was ihaten Albion þa Brutus cum heron;
þa nolde Brutus namare þat hit swa ihaten weore,
ah scupte him nome æfter himseluan.
He was ihaten Brutus, þis lond he clepede Brutaine;
and þa Troinisce men þa temden hine to hærre
æfter Brutone Brutuns heom cleopede. . . . (975-80)
[This land was called Albion when Brutus came here;
He did not want it to be called such anymore,
But would name it after himself.
He was named Brutus, this land he called Britain,
And the Trojan men who held him as lord
after Brutus, called themselves Britons.]

Where Geoffrey of Monmouth locates the name change before Corineus fights Geomagog, Wace reverses this order, inserting a passage describing the building of Trojan settlements (1169-74). Layamon follows the order of events given by Wace, but lays greater stress on the Trojans' ownership of the land: "Nu wes al þis lond iahned a Brutus hond" ("Now all this land was set at Brutus's hand"; 967), "al heo tileden ase heo to þohten / for al hit wes heora aȝen þat heo ouer seȝen" ("they cultivated all as they thought fit, for all that they looked on was their own"; 973-4). This idyllic moment of the text, the end of the Trojans' trials, reveals a reciprocal exchange between people and king. The people's settlement and cultivation of the land enables Brutus to rename it after himself, and they, in turn, respond by renaming themselves in confirmation of their relationship to him.

But interesting as this moment of renaming is, it marks only the end of the process through which the various bands of Trojan exiles unite under Brutus and settle in Britain. Two key moments in the text reveal Layamon's greater focus on the relationship between people and king, as compared to Wace. Diana's prophecy at Logice is the first of these moments, and at the same time, it establishes the Trojans' relationship to their new land.

The story changes little in the passage from Geoffrey to Layamon: the Trojans arrive at a deserted island where they find a temple dedicated to Diana, Brutus assembles twelve wise men and one heathen priest to accompany him into the temple, and there he makes sacrifices to the statue before being told of "a wunsum lond" (618) beyond France that he and the Trojans are to inhabit. Wace relays Brutus's speech indirectly:

> Par plusurs feiz s'umilia
> E la deuesse depreia
> Ke par respuns li enseinnast
> U par signe li demustrast
> Quel region purreit trover
> Bone e paisible a converser. (661-6)
> [By many means he abased himself
> And pleaded of the goddess
> To teach him by her response
> Or show him with signs
> What region he could find
> Good and peaceful to possess.]

Layamon, in contrast to Wace but in keeping with his own general tendency, renders this moment in direct discourse, a speech that goes beyond Wace to reinforce Brutus's concern as that of a leader rather than an individual. Brutus asks to know "whuder ich mæi liðan and ledan mine leoden" ("where I can travel and lead my people"; 663). Throughout this section of the text, Layamon anticipates the naming of the Britons by repeatedly referring to them as "his [Brutus's] monnen" (646), "his ȝunge folc" (757) and so on. Brutus can also stand in for the whole people: when pirates attack the Trojans, Layamon relates that "Brutus hefde þa ouere hond; þa fæie he slow, þe quike he bond" ("Brutus had the upper hand; the doomed he slew, the living he bound"; 647), where Wace reads "Mais li Troïen les venquirent" ("But the Trojans defeated them"; 716). Beyond the reign of Brutus, metonymy is one of the most prominent stylistic devices

Layamon uses to characterize the relationship between the king and people; a good king has access to it, while a bad king, marked by his opposition to the people, does not. But metonymy does not make the people disappear, it operates rather like their voluntary adherence to the label "Briton," making the reader aware of a similar reciprocity. Brutus is able to stand for the Trojans because through his leadership, there will be "nenne swa wreche man þat gold and pal ne dude him on" ("no man so poor that he did not wear gold and fine clothes"; 650).

We see the same metonymic logic in Layamon's presentation of the wrestling match between Corineus and Geomagog,[4] the second moment that characterizes the relationship between people and king. While Brutus himself does not act for the people, Corineus becomes their representative, performing at his king's request. Indeed, through his tremendous strength, Corineus goes beyond being their representative to become an ideal, a movement often repeated by Arthur later in the poem. Michelle R. Warren offers a reading of this scene, as rendered in Geoffrey's *Historia*, which offers a useful starting point because it reveals how differently Layamon uses the scene. Warren's reading starts from the fact that, despite Diana's prophecy, the land is not empty; the giants who "once occupied it" (*HRB* 65) still do.[5] Warren notes that Geoffrey emphasizes Corineus's desire to wrestle with the giants: "Corineus experienced great pleasure from wrestling with the giants" (*HRB* 72), "who enjoyed beyond all reason matching hismelf against such monster" (73), and "Corineus was delighted" (73). She reads this emphasis in terms of "the colonial desire to resemble the native" (Warren 124). This eruption of homoerotic desire can be resolved only through "The fragmentation of the indigenous body on the shore" (125). Ironically, Geomagog, who threatens the colonizer/colonized boundary by

his resemblance to Corineus and his refusal to stay in the mountains, is destroyed at "a liminal space between land and water . . . on the jagged rocks of the boundary itself" (126).

Layamon's presentation of Corineus and the giants follows Wace in omitting Geoffrey's remarks on Corineus's resemblance to the giants and leaving out his desire to wrestle them, but he expands on Wace in the stress placed on the giants' radical difference from the invading Trojan *leod*. Thus, his identification of Geomagog, the chief giant, as "Godes wiðer-saka" ("God's adversary"; 906) contrasts starkly with his praise of "Brutus and his gode folc" (907); even if it bears only coincidental resemblance to the *Beowulf*-poet's othering of Grendel, this label performs the same strategy. Layamon's second key addition to the Geomagog episode radically repositions the wrestling match. Where Geoffrey and Wace each present the wrestling match as a contest held before Brutus, satisfying the king's desire to see who will prove the stronger, Layamon transforms the match into a spectacle for the entire Trojan nation:

> vppen þere sæ-cliua þat folc com tosomne
> . . . . . .
> Þer was moni wepmon, þer wes moni wifmon,
> þer wes muchel folc at þere wrastlinge. (933, 936-7)
> [Upon the cliff the people came together.
> . . . . . .
> There were many men, there were many women
> There was a great crowd at their wrestling match.]

Unlike Brutus's approach to the idol of Diana, or Arthur's fight with the Giant of Mont St. Michel (where he is accompanied only by Kay, Bedevere, and six anonymous followers), Corineus fights Geomagog before the entire people. The wrestling match, a ceremony cementing the Trojans' claim to the island, allows every *wepmon* and *wifmon*

to identify with Corineus in opposition to the native giant. This dynamic of common identification with the hero can be imagined in a similar vein to the one of the newspaper's roles in Anderson's study of print-nationalism. Just as "each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others" (Anderson 35), the Trojans are produced as a common entity ("þat folc") through their common spectatorship.

Although unique dynamics operate around questions of identity in the English text, the problem of Geomagog's resemblance of Corineus--and, by extension, the Briton nation--persists in Layamon's version as a destabilizing force. When the narrator interjects, that "þe Wrse hine luuede" ("the Devil loved him [Geomagog]"; 906), he echoes the repeated condemnations of Diana, on whom the Trojans' collective fate depends, and the undoubted object of the "halinesse mid wrscipen heȝen" ("holy rites with high ceremony"; 912) interrupted by the giants. The narrator's insistent moral sensibility perhaps unintentionally suggests a resemblance between colonizer and colonized.[6] Similarly, despite Layamon's refusal to comment explicitly on Corineus's resemblance to the giant, the physical opposition of these figures in the wrestling match continually threatens to collapse them into a uniform "heo" ("they"). As Corineus becomes increasingly indistinguishable from the giant, the people's national representative becomes contaminated. The wrestling match dramatizes what Homi Bhabha terms the uncontainable "hybridity of imagined communities," the impending breakdown "of homogenous national cultures . . . or 'organic' ethnic communities" (5). This hybridity must be suppressed by Corineus's "mæine" ("strength"; 960), throwing Geomagog from the cliff so that "al þe feond tobarst ær he to folde come" ("the fiend

broke apart before he hit the ground"; 962). Layamon's Geomagog, significantly, appears to bypass the water altogether on his route to hell, eliminating "the stain of giant-blood on the water . . . [that] marks--but only briefly--the contamination of colonial power" in both Geoffrey's and Wace's texts (Warren 125).

While the wrestling match is an isolated incident--one of only three instances of single combat in the text, along with Arthur's battles against Frolle and the Mont St. Michel giant--a similar rhythm of erupting hybridity and its suppression marks the larger scale conflicts which form the dominant mode of cultural contact in the poem. Paradoxically, the direct opposition between nations effected in the battle scenes also undermines efforts to distinguish them; these conflicts are treacherous foundations for the constructions of national identity. The "swikedom" ("treachery"; 4642) of the Roman Hamun displays this tension. The episode is found in Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon: Hamun strips the armour from a fallen Briton and exchanges it for his own, allowing him to get close enough to kill King Wither. But Layamon's shifts in emphasis seem to diminish the threat Hamun poses to national integrity and cultural difference. Geoffrey attributes Hamun's knowledge of the British language to his having "been brought up among British hostages" in Rome (120); Wace recounts that "a Rome entre les ostages, / Aveit apris plusurs languages" ("at Rome amoung the hostages, he had learned many languages"; 4945-6). But Layamon notes merely that "his speche wes al Brutisc Brut swulc he weoren" ("he spoke in British as if he were a Briton"; 4639), omitting any note of explanation. This elision is interesting because, as Kelley M. Wickham-Crowley correctly indicates, Hamun's fluency in the British language is the most important aspect of the disguise ("Anthropological" 16). Layamon similarly simplifies Wace's

presentation of Hamun's infiltration, which Wace narrates by a fourfold repetition of the formula, "Ensemble od les Bretuns . . ." ("Together with the Britons"; 4939-42). Layamon, despite his common use of such repetitive devices, omits it here. In fact, despite almost doubling the length of the episode, Layamon hesitates to describe Hamun's disguise. The English *Brut*'s expansions focus on Hamun's character, particularly his willingness to attack his fellow Romans, and Layamon amplifies Hamun's treachery by having him stab Wither in the back. Indeed, Layamon's repeated interjections, commenting on Hamun's actions as "muchel swikedom" and "swikedom inoh" ("great betrayal" and "enough betrayal"; 4642, 4650) may be roughly parallel to the verbal exuberance Wace displays over the clever, if treacherous, deception. Benedict Anderson, opening *Imagined Communities* with the figure of the Unknown Soldier, indicates that "the cultural roots of nationalism [are] with death" (10), especially violent death. Because the disguise critically destabilizes national identities at the point where they matter most, Layamon passes much stronger judgment on Hamun than does Wace or Geoffrey. By refusing to ornament the episode stylistically, Layamon appears to desire an exclusionary, essentialist sense of the nation in the face of its apparently performative nature.

The language of nationalism, positioned by the last decade's postcolonial critiques and refinements of that language, keeps us aware of the processes through which cultural groups construct themselves. If we follow Bhabha and others in proclaiming the breakdown of the homogenous nation, then, as Patricia Clare Ingham suggests, "medieval studies can also insist that we not look for these identities in a simpler, less complicated, archaic medieval past" (91). Indeed, the *Brut* displays many of the same ambivalences

which disrupt modern representations of the nation, and the textual strategies it deploys to contain them can be only partially successful. However, discussing Layamon's representation of the medieval nation simply in terms of the early twenty-first-century nation produces an insufficient picture of the social forces at play in his work. The structural similarities can easily obscure real cultural differences. Moving forward, then, the next chapter examines the complex interplay between nationalism and medieval Christianity. We have already caught glimpses of the interference which Layamon's moralistic Christian sensibilities can produce in his representation of ostensibly discreet groups. The entrance of conversion narratives into this history creates further disruptions.

The Nation and the Church

In the previous chapter, I examined some of the interactions the *Brut* stages between what we might justifiably call "nations": large groups of peoples held together by a sense of shared language and history. The Brutus section of Layamon's text, which stages the emergence of the British nation from previously scattered Trojan exiles, was particularly relevant to that project. The emergence of this national unit occurs through the acquisition of the island Albion, culminating in the simultaneous renaming of both people and territory. While this shared history seems to offer a set of internally coherent identifying features, these national identities address themselves just as much to the group's outside. The Britons' shared history consists of a series of exclusions, setting off the emergent nation from Greeks, giants, Saxons, Romans, and so on. But the representations of peoples in the poem are not limited to this type of often-violent conflict. My present argument moves towards what I will term the universalizing structures at work in the text, structures that challenge the impulse towards national particularism: Christianity and Empire. Kelley M. Wickham-Crowley identifies "the opposition of heathens against Christians" in the *Brut* ("Innovations" 209), but this opposition does not produce a stable Other and never maps comfortably onto the Briton/non-Briton divide. While the evangelical imperative of Christianity as a social force seeks to reconcile national differences, the particular Christianity manifested in the *Brut* is constantly confronted with and partially determined by national boundaries. If the dream of Empire circulates as the secular counterpart to Christian universalism, uniting disparate peoples under one monarch, the imperial project ultimately fails. These two pulls—towards a Christian, imperial encompassing of all peoples and towards insularism

in both general and specific senses—represent a major dynamic in the *Brut* which is not, and perhaps could not have been, resolved.

Despite the convenience of discussing medieval cultural identifications solely in terms of nationalism, it would be wrong not to concede the predominance of religious modes of identification over and above the national. Benedict Anderson is right to stress the importance of the religious community in medieval consciousness, but as we have already seen he grossly mischaracterizes the cultural underpinnings which enabled this predominance. Because his historical picture of nationalism insists on a clean break at the eighteenth century, after which religious thought loses its relevance and before which the nation lacks its enabling technologies, his analysis precludes even the possibility of mutual influence.[7] John Armstrong's *Nations before Nationalism* once again proves helpful to fill this gap. Armstrong bases his argument on the importance of myth to the integrity of ethnic, national, or religious polities; the administrative aspect of such polities is predicated on the need to disseminate these legitimizing myths. In a move similar to Anderson's, Armstrong passes over the particular content of a given religious or national identity to study the authoritative structures behind "the penetrative power of religious organizations" (201). By the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the Western Church had long since established an ecclesiastical structure—the centralized hierarchy and "parochial network" (202)—capable of communicating the content of Western Christianity to the masses. In contrast, Armstrong argues that, as premodern polities grew beyond the level of the city-state, they lacked the bureaucratic means to transmit their own secular myths (201). While this disparity offers an easy explanation for the

strength of religious modes of identification, it still posits religion and nationalism as discrete structures of meaning.

The priest-as-historian figure we see in Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon exemplifies the considerable overlap between ecclesiastical authority and the dissemination of national myths. However, the relationship between church and secular authorities is often better characterized as conflict than overlap; the open struggles arising from the ninth century onwards in the movement for church reform certainly coloured the church-state interactions in Layamon's day. Uta-Renate Blumenthal's history of *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (1988) recounts the "wave of renewal" (7) that spread from monasteries in Lotharingia and Burgundy, beginning in the early tenth century. The monastic reform movement, centred at Cluny and focusing on strict adherence to the Rule of St. Benedict, required the monasteries' greater independence from local church and lay officials. Monastic reform had a profound influence on the church at large, influencing the broader ecclesiastical reform movement that took hold during the papacy of Leo IX (1049-54). This movement focused on the prohibition of clerical marriage and simony, "the purchase or sale of ecclesiastical offices, estates, and sacraments" (75). Although Blumenthal describes both movements as "expressions of the contemporary spirituality, whereby church and world were but different aspects of a single unified Christian entity" (65), reform was soon "shifted to an attack on lay influence in the church" (87), making cooperation between church and lay authorities impossible. As "lay influence translated primarily into influence on the appointments to bishoprics and abbeys and on the right to

dispose of ecclesiastical properties" (87), the outcome of this movement lay in the Investiture Contest between Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII.

The repercussions of the Investiture Conflict were certainly still directly felt in Layamon's day, all the more so in England because similar issues had led to the murder of Saint Thomas Becket in 1170. Gregory VII ascended to the papacy in 1070, and Blumenthal suggests he "applied the required absolute obedience to God to himself as pope and as representative of the Apostle Peter" (117). Gregory supported the reform movement's prohibition of clerical marriage and simony, but the most noteworthy aspects of his reform program were his claim to "the right to depose secular rulers and his general prohibition of investiture" (118). Blumenthal expresses reservations with the common view that "the prohibition of lay investiture was the effective cause of the dispute between pope and king" (120), encouraging us to focus on the struggle's implications for the broader hierarchy of loyalties that underwrote medieval society. The dispute's precise causes are perhaps less important than its effects, at least for this study. In any event, at the diet of Worms in 1076, the German bishops "withdrew their obedience" to Gregory, who responded by excommunicating "both bishops and king" and deposing Henry as king (Blumenthal 121). The next winter, at Canossa in Northern Italy, Henry made penance and received absolution from Gregory. Blumenthal expresses the consequences of the conflict this way:

> The immediate accountability of the ruler to God ceased to exist. The monarchy was thus deprived of its sacrality. . . . The venerable formula of the king as the servant of the church became under Gregory VII a much more precise and realistic formula of the princes as vassals of Saint Peter, that is, the pope, . . . (124)

In England, similar questions played out in Thomas Becket's refusal to submit to the demands of Henry II, and Becket's martyrdom produced the same ultimate result. M.T. Clanchy writes, "At Canterbury in 1174 [Henry] at last acknowledged Becket's superiority by walking barefoot to the martyr's shrine and submitting to a flogging from the clergy and monks" (93).

The reform movement's stress on church liberty did not produce two discrete structures sharing minimal contact, no more than does the more modern political ideal of the separation of church and state. To map out religion and nation in this way would be to repeat Benedict Anderson's error within a spatial, rather than temporal, frame. Kathleen Davis's work on the Alfredian canon suggests one path into this interchange. Just as modern emergent nations "situate themselves within and against the universalizing terms and institutions of a capitalist world economy and the ideals of 'Western' morality and secular democracy" (616), so medieval nations sought legitimacy by claiming the cultural currency of Christianity. Observing the many translations among the vernacular texts produced during Alfred's reign, Davis suggests that translation produces a simultaneously "universally recognizable" and specifically "national" canon (615-6). However, as we have seen, enormous political changes took place between the ninth and the late twelfth centuries--that is, between the Alfredian canon and Layamon's *Brut*--altering this dynamic. Secular polities no longer stood beside the church, the king no longer shared in the direct link to God, but these were understood to be subordinate to the religious sphere. And while both Layamon's and Alfred's works consist of translations, Layamon's subject matter has a more immediately secular orientation.

Layamon identifies himself as a priest in the poem's first line, so we should not be surprised to find his history permeated with his Christian sensibilities. But as Françoise Le Saux notes, Layamon displays a basic misunderstanding of trinitarian theology in his explanation of the Trinity in ll. 4524-31 (*Poem* 177), and his alterations to Wace's version of Samuel's beheading of Agag (Layamon 8291-337; Wace 7851-86) introduce a contradiction with the biblical source (*Poem* 176). In light of this lack of doctrinal orthodoxy or rigorous knowledge of Scripture, Kelley M. Wickham-Crowley is right to label Layamon's Christianity an "ethical culture" ("Anthropological" 23). Christians good, heathens bad: this echo of George Orwell's sheep offers a simplistic, though by no means inadequate, rendition of the *Brut*'s ethical framework. Lesley Johnson terms this the "judgemental axis" that patterns the *Brut*'s historical narrative and is most apparent between the reigns of Vortiger and Carric—that is, from the coming of the Saxons to the conquest by Gurmund ("Reading" 150). This binary obviously holds an appeal for Layamon's morality, but Johnson also notes that "Insular Christians *versus* incoming pagan enemies" (150) does not adequately represent Layamon's portrayal of British and English history. Intrinsic in the opposition of Christians to heathens is the emphasis on baptism (*fulluht*) and conversion, an emphasis that unsettles the possibility of ethnic or national particularism.

Conversion disrupts the simple equation between the good, Christian Britons and the evil, heathen Saxons (and others) in a way that Layamon carefully controls and which proves troublesome to many modern critics of the poem. Among contemporary critics of the *Brut*, Kelley Wickham-Crowley gives the most attention to the influence of Layamon's Christianity on the shape of his history. Her attention is almost always to the

sometimes idiosyncratic manifestation of Christianity in the *Brut* itself, rightly passing over the more orthodox relationship of Christianity to history found in more properly religious texts. Her attempts to come to grips with the dynamic of religion and nation in the *Brut* are revealing: convinced that Layamon "privileged the Britons as ancient and loyal Christians right from the first" ("Anthropological" 12), she argues that, in the final movement of the poem and "Under Christian cover, Lawman homogenizes the [Welsh or British] culture he celebrates by assimilating it into a generic 'Anglen' group, a Christian nation" (22). Strictly speaking, neither of these statements is accurate. The Britons do not convert until the reign of King Luces, nearly a third of the way through the poem, and rather than being assimilated into the Anglen, the poem explicitly excludes them from the English nation in these final lines:

> Þæs Bruttes on ælc ende foren to Walisce londe,
> and heore laȝen leofeden and heore leodene þæuwen;
> and et wunieð þære, swa heo doð aueremære.
> And Ænglisce kinges walden þas londes,
> and Bruttes hit loseden, þis lond and þas leoden,
> þat næuere seoððen mære kinges neoren here. (16088-93)
> [The Britons from every region went forth to Wales,
> And lived under their own laws and their people's ways;
> And they still live there, as they will forevermore.
> And English kings ruled over these lands
> and the Britons lost it, this land and this nation,
> so they have never since been kings here.]

Abandoning the scheme Wickham-Crowley puts forward does entail abandoning the critical weight of writing criticism on behalf of an oppressed people, but such a scheme flattens the complex dynamic between religion and nation at stake in the poem.

The conversion of the Britons under King Luces is the first of two major conversion narratives in the *Brut*—the second being St. Augustine's mission among the

English—and it reveals the deep implication of the political in the religious. While the Britons are certainly not "ancient and loyal Christians right from the first" as Wickham-Crowley would have them, Layamon does repeatedly excuse their heathenism. Brutus, Corineus, Belin and Brennes, after all, long predate the birth of Christ. When the moment of their conversion finally arrives, the English *Brut* shows a significant expansion over Wace, as Le Saux has noted (157). Layamon greatly amplifies the two major episodes in that narrative: Teilesin's annunciation of the birth of Christ (Layamon 4521-73; Wace 4850-78) and the conversion itself (Layamon 5040-5101; Wace 5212-69). Layamon follows Wace's repetition of the birth of Christ, first in the narrator's voice and then in Teilesin's, but he adds between them a similar pronouncement by Kinbelin. Kinbelin is a minor king, his reign noteworthy only because it is contemporary with the birth of Christ, but he plays an active role in bringing this news to Britain. In Wace's account of the announcement, Teilesin arrives at a festival where Kinbelin asks him to prophesy something about the future, so he prophesies the salvation to follow from Christ's birth. Layamon's revisions clearly shift the agency from Teilesin to Kinbelin and, with him, to the Britons. Where Wace labels Teilesin "un devin" (4855), Layamon says the Britons "heolten hine for witie" ("held him as a prophet"; 4536); his position is coherent relative to the people, who sanction him because "al heo hut funden soð" ("they found all [he told them] was true"; 4538). The king, representative of this group, deliberately turns to Teilesin, sending twelve knights to "bad hine comen to þat he nan oðer seolden don" ("bid him to come so that he could do no other"; 4541). Layamon's Kinbelin displays a greater command of the situation than Wace's, asking only "to what þis tocne wule twn, To wulche þinge temen, / for herfore is alches londes folc

lædliche afered" ("to what this sign relates, what thing it means, for because of it people from every land are terribly afraid"; 4556-7). Thus, the religious content of the prophecy Teilesin delivers is located within the political concerns of the nation and its king, as an answer to Kinbelin's desire to calm the people. When Layamon directly translates Wace's closing remark that "Bruttes herof ȝemden and noht hit ne forȝeten" ("the Britons noted that and did not forget it"; 4572),[8] he locates this exchange between king and prophet within the context of the entire nation which legitimates them both.

The baptism itself relies on a different pattern of king-people exchange, but the most religious moment of conversion still depends on a very secular structure. Just as the earlier prophecy narrative revolved around Kinbelin, the narrative of conversion has King Luces as its high, central point. Luces, although a minor king like Kinbelin, "wes þe bezste mon þe auer hæfde kinedom / seoðden to Brutlonde com Bruttes þe hit biwon" ("was the best man ever to hold the kingship since Brutus, who won Britain, first came"; 5034-5). His attributes are typical of the good kings and, as Wickham-Crowley observes ("Bakhtin" 210), more generally of Christians in the narrative: royal born, educated, and prosperous. This much Layamon simply borrows from Wace, who described Luces as "corteis" and "de grant onesté" ("chivalrous" and "of great honesty"; 5210-11), ultimately consonant with Geoffrey's portrayal. While Layamon replaces Wace's mention of Jesus Christ's miracles and signs with tidings of Peter's ministry in Rome, the narrative otherwise follows roughly the same path: Luces sends to the Pope, Eleutherius, to learn more of "þan Lauerd Criste" (5050), receives two bishops, Dunian and Fagan, at his court, and ultimately receives baptism. The English poem diverges noticeably after this point, as Layamon renders the conversion of the court and common Britons in

shocking, violent tones. Donald Bzdyl lists Luces's execution of "þa fulluht nulden vnderfon" ("those who would not receive baptism"; 5073) among his examples of Layamon's cruel streak, a tendency he attributes "less [to] an innate cruelty than [to] a pragmatic conviction that harsh means lead to a beneficial end" (14). Layamon situates this action within the context of loyalty politics; the unwillingness to undergo baptism is not a religious question but a matter of disloyalty. The executed, unbaptized Britons stand in contrast to the king's good men and those "þe him buȝen wolden" ("who would obey him [Luces]"; 5072).

The existence of these disloyal Britons is entirely Layamon's innovation; Geoffrey writes that "On all sides the peoples of the local tribes hurried to follow their King's example" (125), and Wace likewise imagines all the Britons following Luces in baptism without question (5233-4). If only for a moment, the figure of these Britons disrupts the straightforward conversion narrative, exposing the heterogeneity of the *leode* that must be violently suppressed. And how are we to understand the relationship presented here between the secular and religious authorities of the king, in light of the historical currents discussed above? Certainly, this passage undoes the simplistic identification of the Britons as the perfect Christian nation, but it also illuminates some of the ideological trends lying behind the Investiture Contest. Uta-Renate Blumenthal argues that "the terms *obedience* and *disobedience* are by far the most frequently encountered twin concepts" in Gregory VII's correspondence (117). After his death, "The Roman council of 1102 declared disobedience an outright heresy" (117). Layamon and Geoffrey can both be seen to participate in a common discourse of loyalty politics, expressed through a stress on acts of obedience, which arises naturally out of king-subject

and state-church relations. Ultimately, Luces's actions do not stand out from the church but rather are framed by the actions of the bishops' preaching and cleansing of the temples.

While the execution of the non-baptized expels a dissident element and temporarily resecures the homogeneous Christian, king-centred *leode*, Layamon's account of the establishment of the British church remains fraught with the specter of recurrent heathenism. Le Saux rightly argues that Layamon "actually gives us a darker spiritual image of" the Britons (*Sources* 159), contrary to many critics' insistence on reading them as a perfect chosen people.[9] The cleansing of pagan temples and the establishment of Christian churches in their place, which Wace describes "from a purely technical point of view" (*Poem* 157), reaches the fervour Layamon usually reserves for battle scenes. Layamon adds violent details such as the burning of heathen idols "inne swærte fure" ("in dark fires" 5081) and expresses concern that, in spite of this work, the people were "swiðe awemmed, / ladliche inipered þurh niðfulne craft" ("greatly corrupted, wickedly subverted through evil ways"; 5095-6). The contested ground of this passage, the conversion of the physical land to complement the conversion of the people, coincides with a heightening of rhetorical energy. The passage is marked off with four repetitions of the folkloric formula, "Þa þis wes al idon, þa token heo oðer weise on" ("When all this was done, they did still more"; 5074, 5083, 5086, 5091), producing the passage's forward momentum. A stricter, though by no means regular, pattern of alliteration and rhyme appears throughout this passage (cf. 5078, 5084, 5092, and 5093 for alliteration and 5080, 5083, 5087-8, 5089, 5094 for rhyme and near-rhyme). Layamon regularly employs these devices to accelerate his battle scenes. Viewed

through the poem's broad aesthetic patterns, these techniques signal Layamon's heightened interest in the events narrated. Just as the battlefield becomes the space where national identities are at their most vivid and most vulnerable—as nationality becomes manifested in the same tokens (armour, heraldry, etc.) that expose it to easy impersonation—Layamon's battlefield rhetoric produces the Britons' emphatic conversion simultaneous with their returns to heathenism. A modified fifth repetition of the "Þa þis" formula ties off the conversion narrative, "Þa alle þas þinges weoren idone, þa ferden þa biscopes to Rome" ("When all these things were done, the bishops returned to Rome"; 5098), but Layamon undercuts this rhetorical containment only eight lines later as the Britons "to swiðe" ("too quickly"; 5106) forget what Dunian and Fagan have taught them. The repeated failures of containment strategies mark the conversion narrative, leaving the Britons' status indeterminate until the opposition of foreign heathens shores up Christian Britain.

The explicit heathenism of the invading Saxons produces a rigidity to religious identities which sustains the long conflict from the reign of Vortiger until Gurmund's conquest, a conflict that underwrites almost half of the *Brut*. The "judgemental axis" (Johnson, "Reading" 150), not surprisingly, gains its coherence only with the arrival of a non-Briton, non-Christian presence. Just as the personal virtues of Kinbelin and Luces prepared the Britons for the arrival of Christianity, Vortiger's complete lack of such virtue anticipates the arrival of the Saxons and their heathen beliefs. While the representation of Vortiger's exchange with the Saxons does not show the same energy as Dunian and Fagan's British mission, Layamon again uses a repetitive formula to bind the passage together. An epithet attached to Vortiger echoes throughout the conversation,

"of elchen vuele he was war" ("he knew every evil way"; 6899, 6929, 6956), staining both parties in the exchange. Whatever spiritual flaws the Britons' may have, the poem constantly estranges Vortiger from his people. Although Layamon inherits the narrative content from Wace and Geoffrey, including Vortiger's willingness to deal with treacherous foreigners, the addition of this epithet further vilifies him and, by extension, the Saxons who associate with him. As has been noted by many critics, Layamon's Saxons prove villainous enough in their own right. On their arrival in Britain, Hengest and Horsa are identified as "þa færeste men þa auere her comen / ah heo weore hæðene" ("the fairest men who had ever come here, but they were heathens"; 6885-6), and the fact of their heathenism occupies much of their initial exchange with Vortiger. Wace mentions only their size and strange language (6709-10), but he does not initially identify them as pagan. Unlike the Britons' incomplete and conflicted transition to Christianity, the Saxons' heathenism is remarkably straightfoward; indeed, "Saxon" and "heathen" are used almost interchangeably.

The British nobles' resistance to Vortiger and the heathen Saxons finally produces the uncomplicated nation of Christian Britons that Luces's reign could not. The impetus to this resistance is the arrival of "þritte þusend and æc ma" ("thirty thousand and yet more"; 7247) warriors from Saxony with Octa and Ebissa. The spatial details Layamon adds to Wace's account of this migration--the coming of "hæðene hære-gumen to hirede þis kinges / þat þis lond wes swa vul of uncuðe leoden" ("heathen wariors to the court of the king until the land was full of foreigners"; 7254-5)--emphasize the contamination of the nation's key symbolic spaces. Such contamination produces a crisis of identity among the British, blurring the nation's population until

þat nes nan swa wis mon no swa ȝer-witele
þat mihte todæle þa Cristine and þa hæðene
for þa hæðene weoren swa riue and auere heo comen biliue. (7256-8)
[There was no man, however wise or clever
Who might separate the Christians and the heathens
For the heathens were so many and kept on arriving.]

Ironically, in giving expression to this slippage of Christian into heathen, Layamon, following Wace, implicitly equates Christian with Briton, just as "heathen" stands for "Saxon" throughout the passage. This equation is picked up in the exchange between "Bruttes" ("the Britons"l 7259) and Vortiger, where Layamon greatly expands Wace's indirect discourse. The parallel structure of the assembled Britons' accusation of Vortiger--"þu letest Godes laȝen *uor uncuðe leoden*, / and nult ne ihæren ure Drihten *for þissen hæðene cnihten*" ("you are abandoning God's laws for a foreign nation, and will not worship our Lord *for the sake of these heathen knights*"; 7267-8, emphasis added)--explicitly equates the foreign with the heathen. The contrast of "ure Drihten" establishes the inverse. As Françoise Le Saux notes, "the whole passage is stamped with the seal of religious fervour--an element lacking in Wace" (*Sources* 161), in line with Layamon's emphasis on the narrative's crusade theme. In contrasting Vortimer to Vortiger as a "Cristine king" (7309), Layamon gives Vortimer "the stature of a first Arthur" (*Sources* 161), who will expel the heathen peoples and restore Christianity to the land.

From his initial words on hearing of Uther's death, "Lauerd Crist, Godes sune, beon us nu a fultume, / þat ich mote on life Goddes laȝen halden" ("Lord Christ, son of God, help us now, that I may hold God's laws while I live"; 9928-9), Arthur is both "aðelest Brutten" ("noblest of Britons") and the most Christian king, whose reign

presents the unfulfilled promise of Christian empire. The Whitsunday mass at Caerleon presents the clearest statement of this vision, and although much of the passage is directly translated from Wace's account, our reading of Layamon's rendition—which amounts to Layamon's reading—must recognize that the poem's general heightening of religious fervour positions the scene differently. Le Saux's *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and its Sources* reveals a surprising pattern of expansion and compression in the Arthurian portion of the *Brut*. While the total length of the section is "only 2.7% longer than its counterpart in Wace" (32), Le Saux notes that Layamon radically restructures it, nearly doubling Arthur's conquests (Wace 9009-10174; Layamon 9893-12079), but cutting the Roman campaign and Mordred's treachery by nearly as much (Wace 10175-13294; Layamon 12080-14297) (Le Saux 31). According to Le Saux's admittedly crude scheme, a map of Arthur's expanded ascent and compressed fall would reach its peak very nearly at this coronation scene. Indeed, Layamon places Arthur's intention to "bere his crune him on" ("wear his crown"; 12099) very near the exact midpoint (l. 12095) of the Arthurian narrative. The divergence of the English *Brut*'s structure, therefore, produces this scene as the thematic and structural high point of Arthur's rule, the point where he most nearly establishes the Empire capable of uniting the disparate national elements under a Christian banner.

The passage changes little from Geoffrey to Layamon, perhaps because its strong emphasis on Arthur's supremacy could easily serve both Wace and Layamon without significant alteration. The major elements include the list of Arthur's retainers, followed by the three archbishops, comment on Dubric's piety, and the list of conquered kings, culminating in the declaration that

Nes na cniht ne na swein, ne oht mon þat weore þein,
from þa porz of Spaine to þan tune of Alemaine,
þat þider icomen nere if he iboden weore,
al for Arðures æie aðeles cunnes. (12183-6)
[There was neither knight nor squire, nor any thane,
from the ports of Spain to the towns of Germany,
who would not have come had he been bidden,
all out of respect for the noble Arthur.]

Layamon replaces Wace's description of the pleasures of Arthur's court (10331-6) with the more deferential stress on Arthur's *aðel*-ness, his nobility. Rather than reading this as a reflection of Layamon's less refined or anti-chivalric sensibilities, a reading that has fallen out of favour, we should note how Arthur is elevated as the focus shifts from his courtiers to his personal virtue. However, more significant changes are evident in the representation of the physical coronation itself. Wace simply recounts that the three archbishops "le rei corunerent" ("crowned the king"; 10362), and Geoffrey writes that "the Archbishops were led forward to the palace, so that they could place the royal crown upon the King's head" (228). Layamon's telling is not significantly longer, but he does introduce certain phrases that shift the scene's symbolic weight. The passage is worth quoting at length:

Þat al þis folc isomned was at sele þan kingge,
þa com þe Whitesundæi alse Drihten hine sende,
þa comen þa biscopes alle biuoren heore kinge,
and þa ærchebiscopes þreo biuoren Arðure,
and þene kinehelm nome þa him wes icunde
and setten uppen his hafde mid heȝere blisse.
Swa heo gunnen hine lede, al mid Godes rede. . . . (12198-204)
[When all the people were gathered at the king's command,
And Whitsunday had come, as the Lord appointed,
Then came all the bishops before their king,
Then came the three archbishops before Arthur,
And took the crown that he merited
And set it upon his head amidst great rejoicing.
So they began to lead him in procession, all by God's counsel. . . .]

An uncomplicated connection of Church and Empire, implicit in Wace and Geoffrey's accounts through the archbishops' role in the coronation, is drawn out here. God appoints the progress of time to Whitsunday and seems to foreordain the procession of the king; these twin mentions of God's intervention in history frame the image of the crown, Arthur's by (divine?) right. This emphatic religious language gives another instance of the fervour Le Saux finds throughout the poem, but at this point Layamon's Christian zeal coincides with his investment in the ceremonial language of secular power, the register of nationalism. In the promise of Empire—laid out in the roll call of the subordinate kings, united in their respect for Arthur—we can see the text striving to overcome the opposition between a secular politics dominated by national particularism and a religious institution and creed founded in a universalist impulse.

Of course, the narrative Layamon inherits from Geoffrey does not allow this opposition to disappear entirely, and while he does compress the failed attack on Rome, the poem cannot elide the ultimate failure of the imperial project. Just as the listing of conquered kings confirmed Arthur's crown-wearing as an imperial rite, the imperial overtones of Arthur's Roman campaign can be detected in the lists of the Eastern kings allied with Rome and the kings from Northern and Western Europe assembled under Arthur. While the Romans are among the Britons' perpetual enemies in this history, their appearance here is unmistakably racialized through their association with a king like the African Ofustesar: "mid him com moni Aufrican; of Ethiope he brohte þa bleomen" ("with him came many Africans; he brought the black men from Ethiopia"; 12666). Of course, Arthur's forces cannot remain unified even in the face of this Other, and

Layamon offers only a perverse reflection of the universalist dream in the final battle with the Romans, a battle so terrible

> þat at þan laste nuste nan kempe
> whæm he sculde slæn on and wham he sculde sparien
> for no icneou na man oðer þere for vnimete blode. (13718-20)
> [that in the end no warrior could tell
> who he should slay and who he should spare,
> for no man recognized any other for the excess of blood.]

That the failure of Arthur's empire arises not from in-fighting between the subordinate kings but from Mordred, "Arðures mæi" ("Arthur's kinsman"; 12713), is obviously not Layamon's invention. But in all three versions of this narrative, it initiates the internal divisions that afflict the Britons for the rest of their history. Though it may be apparent only to modern readers, the heathen King Gurmund's ability to forge a successful international army seems powerfully ironic in the face of the Christian Arthur's failure.

Layamon's *Brut* illustrates the complex relationship between structures of religious and secular authority, as well as the effects these structures produced on personal identity. Abandoning Anderson's oft-repeated suggestion that nationalism could emerge only with the decline of religious sensibility, we have explored the exchanges and conflicts between these two emotional attachments. The Investiture Contest and the martyrdom of Thomas Becket still coloured discussions of church and state authority for Layamon's day, perhaps more powerfully than for Geoffrey or Wace. But the interactions of church and state authority in the English *Brut* do not reduce to their real-world history; they reflect a more cooperative model, frequently validating the king as a divinely-sanctioned crusader against the invading heathens. Certainly, this representation fits with many critics' sense that Layamon's Christianity bears a largely moral character,

less interested in the hierarchy and authority of the church or monarchy than in the moral attributes of the individual king, popes, and bishops. The next chapter takes up the poem's second major conversion narrative--Augustine's mission among the English--in terms of the increasingly ambivalent relationship of the English and Britons. There again we will see neither religious identity solely determined by the national, nor national identity produced entirely within the context of religious doctrine.

Nationalism and the English Question

Quite deliberately, I have left what might, by way of understatement, be termed "the English problem" until this final chapter. The discussion has two distinct yet equally contentious threads, and we may roughly term these the problems of the English *in* the *Brut* and the Englishness *of* the *Brut*. The second of these concerns stems from the obvious fact that Layamon has chosen to work in the English language, in a time when very few writers did so. This simple fact has spun off into questions of Layamon's awareness and use of Old English poetic devices, the extent to which the archaisms present in the Caligula manuscript were deliberately chosen, speculations on the origins of his verse form, and ultimately into pronouncements on the political motivations behind the English *Brut*. This final point renders unavoidable the links between the externals of the poem—a serviceable, though not entirely appropriate label, for it must encompass stylistic and linguistic aspects of the text itself—and its internal, dramatic content. If the critics addressing the problem of the English in the *Brut* can look to an immediately accessible text, with fewer of the frustrating holes and gaps that mar the search for the *Brut*'s historical contexts, this fact has produced no less controversy. Layamon's feelings towards the Saxons before the death of Arthur are easy enough to discern; the representation of the English after Gurmund defeats King Carric is much more nuanced. Owing to the incomplete state of research into the historical situation of the *Brut*'s production, the question of the *Brut*'s Englishness has been dealt with largely by extrapolating the context from the text itself. Because I am not capable of discriminating between the extremely varied results of this work, I will leave the question of the *Brut*'s

Englishness aside as far as possible in this final chapter, in order to focus on the representation of the ascending Germanic migrants and their interactions with the declining British in the poem's post-Arthurian section. The picture that emerges is made up of profound indeterminacies, shifting allegiances, and the reduction of nationality to instrumental purposes simultaneous with the obsolescence of the powerful Christian-heathen opposition.

Our response to the "English problem" will rest primarily on our understanding of Layamon's vision of history. Daniel Donoghue attempted to read the poem's final movement in terms of the "overriding providential design" (561) common in contemporary histories. Under this historiographical trope, which Donoghue roots in Gildas and which is certainly present in a text like Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglem*,[10] the historian reads invading forces as "the instruments of God's punishment, which has been brought on by the unrepentant behavior of the Anglo-Saxons and, earlier, the Britons" (561). The history of the Anglo-Saxons' dominance over the Britons presents an analogue to the Normans' dominance over the Anglo-Saxons, incorporating that defeat "into a vision of salvation history" and making "the change in fortune for Laȝamon's contemporaries comprehensible and easier to accept" (561). A number of essays in the 1994 collection, *The Text and Tradition of Laȝamon's* Brut, take issue with this reading, proposing more neutral models such as "the wheel of history" (Wright 170) or the natural "pattern of arrival and settlement that had hitherto been the rhythm of Britain's history" (Noble 182). However, with the English nation's equally, and eventually more, valid claim to the island, the accustomed Briton-outsider dynamic breaks down, and the poem

becomes increasingly resistant to schematization. Among the critical views of the *Brut*, I am most compelled by the picture Johnson and Wogan-Browne offer, that "The *Brut* tells a story about change, transformation, loss and accretion" (103).

Critics of the *Brut* will commonly turn to the renaming trope for signs of Layamon's picture of history. The device itself is equally common in Wace, where "etymological surveys offer opportunities for recognising political, ethnic, linguistic impermanence and national change" (Johnson, "Etymologies" 132). In Chapter One, we looked at the first renaming passage, tying it to the emergence of the British as a unified nation, but Layamon makes other uses of the trope. The renaming of London is typical: Brutus names it "Troye þe Newe" (1017), after his death the people use "Trinouant" (1020) until the reign of King Lud, when it is renamed "Kaer Lud" (1026), which in turn is corrupted into "Lundin" (1028), becoming "Lundene" (1029) with the arrival of the English and "Lundres" according to the "leod-ðeawe" ("usage"; 1031) of the French. The entire transition leads Layamon to reflect,

> Þus is þas burh iuaren seððen heo ærest wes areræd;
> þus is þis eitlond igon from honde to hond
> þet alle þa burȝes þe Brutus iwrohte
> and heora noma gode þa on Brutus dæi stode
> beoð swiðe afelled þurh warf of þon folke. (1032-6)
> [So has the city fared, since it was first built;
> So has this island passed from hand to hand
> until all the cities that Brutus built
> and their good names, which stood in Brutus's day
> Have all been lost through changes in population.]

During the reign of King Lud, Layamon reiterates London's naming cycle in roughly the same language, changing only the last step. The repetition reads "Seoððen comen Normans mid heore nið-craften / and nemneded heo Lundres —þeos leodes heo

amærden!" ("Since then the Normans came with their wicked ways, and named it London—they ruined this nation!"; 3547-8). This is an isolated outburst of anti-Norman sentiment—it naturally does not find a parallel in Wace, who offers a more neutral linguistic explanation[11]—but it partakes in Layamon's generally negative sense of these name changes. Renaming is, in the first instance, a process of corruption, the loss of "noma gode" (1035), and name changes which originate outside the British nation are particularly suspect. Although Layamon preserves the etymologies he finds in Wace, he seems uncomfortable with the exposure of "not only the continuity of imagined political communities, but also the processes of their change and discontinuity" (Johnson, "Etymologies" 127).

A profound discontinuity erupts with Gurmund's conquest of the island, and a renaming passage whose meaning critics have hotly debated accompanies this disruption. After securing his conquest, and destroying Christianity on the island, Gurmund donates the island to a group of Saxons, "alse he heom a forward hædde if he hit biwunne" ("as he had promised them, if he won it"; 14671). Upon receiving the land, these Saxons rename it after their own homeland:

> Of Englen heo comen, and þerof heo nomen nomen,
> and letten heom cleopien fuliwis þat folc þat wes Ænglis;
> and þis lond cleopeden Ænglelond, for hit wes al on heore honde.
> (14673-5)
> [From Angles they came, they took their own name from there,
> And they were certainly called the English people;
> and this land they named England, because it was all in their hand.]

I.J. Kirby, in "Angles and Saxons in Laȝamon's *Brut*" (1964), put forward the influential thesis that this passage produces a distinction between the Saxon invaders, whom Layamon unequivocally condemns and vilifies, and the newly arrived Angles, or English,

whom Layamon treats far more favourably (51-2). While the Germanic peoples certainly claim a greater share of Layamon's sympathy from this point forward, Neil Wright has raised serious problems with Kirby's readings. Wright argues, first, that the distinction between Angles and Saxons does not originate with Layamon. Rather, the same pattern appears in the *Historia*: "the English are there regularly termed *Saxones*, whereas the term *Angli* occurs only sporadically in the final chapters of the text" (162). The explicit renaming of the island is but briefly mentioned in the First Variant Version of the *HRB*, which Wace is thought to have used, but even in the Vulgate text, Geoffrey first uses "Angli" in roughly the same area, the beginning of Augustine's mission, a shift Wright attributes to a change in Geoffrey's sources (162). Geoffrey's account of Augustine's mission marks the start of his heavy reliance on Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*; where the written sources Geoffrey uses to this point "invariably refer to the English as *Saxones*[,] . . . Bede prefers to call them *Angli*" (Wright 162). However, as Wright notes, the implications of this change are amplified by both Wace and Layamon, producing the change of dominion from British to English.

The change of dominion in the English *Brut* is a more ambivalent process than we find in Wace's account. Lesley Johnson's suggestion to read name changes as signs of both continuity and discontinuity provides a helpful way into this unstable moment in the text. Wace is straightforward in accounting for the change: "Novel reis e novels seignurs" ("New kings and new lords"; 13658) established dominance over the island and chose to continue using their own language. Layamon's conservative feelings on this issue are well known to us; he records the name changes this way:

Seoððe ærest Bruttes bæhȝen to þissen londe
Brutaine hit wes ihaten, of Brutten nom taken,
a þat þis folc com þa þisne nome him binom.
And moniee of þan burȝen and monie of þan tunen
and monie of þan londen and of þan hamen
heo binomen heore namen, al for Bruttene sceome,
and nomen al þis lond and setten hit al an heore hond. . . . (14676-82)
[Just as, when the Britons first arrived in this land,
They named it Britain, after the Britons,
When this folk came, they removed that name.
And many of the cities, many of the towns
Many of the regions, many of the homesteads
they removed their [old] names, to the Britons' shame,
and renamed all this land, setting it at their own hand. . . .]

Layamon stresses the scope of the renaming far beyond Wace's mention that "Les nuns des viles tresturnerent" ("They translated the names of the towns"; 13660), but he preserves the comparison Wace draws with the island's first name change. Where the London passages cited above give Brutus's names a prelapsarian quality in contrast to the corrupted names applied by later arrivals, here British and English names arise from similar processes. The apparent absence of objective moral comment—replaced here by the subjective "for Bruttene sceome" (14681)—on these later names and their comparison with the Britons' naming practices amounts to their equal legitimacy and signals the passage of dominion to the English. However, this dominion is fragile, and Layamon's persistent sympathies for the Britons can be seen in the latently violent language of theft and removal which pervades here.

If dominion over the island is changing hands, to use Layamon's metaphor in this passage, it remains an open question just who receives it. Neil Wright argues that Layamon clearly tells us in two places that "Gurmund's covenant was made with the Saxons" (165). I would argue Wright understates the case: the betrayal of Carric which

allows Gurmund into the country and the negotiations that secure the Saxons' claim to the island are clearly carried out by "Sexisce monne" (14483), "selest of þan kunne / þa Hengest of Sexlonde hider mid him brohte" ("greatest [or best] of the race that Hengest of Saxony brought here"; 14489-90). Layamon makes clear the composition of the alliance against Carric, telling us how, after their negotiations, "Þa weoren heo al an, Gurmund and Sexesce men" ("Then they were át one, Gurmund and the Saxons"; 14512). Where Kirby found inconsistency between this fact and the Angles' inheritance of the island (59), Wright identifies the simplest solution: "the 'Angles' to whom power is given are Saxons" (165). The introduction of "English" to describe them explains "the Saxons' origin in the region known as Angles" (Wright 165), just as Wace used it. To support his argument, Wright notes that at Hengest's first appearance Layamon *introduces* Hengest's origins in "þa ilken ænde þe Angles is ihaten" ("the same end [of Alemaine] called Angles"; 6912), clearly presenting him "as a Saxon from *Angles*" (Wright 166). However, just as the name Britain "a summe stude cleouieð faste" ("in some places still holds fast"; 981), the name "Sexisce" refuses to disappear from the text, to confusing effect in the late stages.

From the passage of dominion until near the end of Augustine's mission, neither Layamon nor Wace make mention of the inhabitants of England as either English or Saxons, and when they finally do, the two groups appear to be somewhat distinct peoples. We hear of Augustine's travels through England, where "he fullehtede Englisce men, he fullehtede Sexisce men" ("He baptized Englishmen, he baptized Saxon men"; 14821). Wace mentions the baptism of both "li Engleis e li Saissun" (13813). The relationship between the two peoples is close, as close as the "eorles" and "beornes" of the previous

line, so that the Britons' refusal to submit to "þan Enlisce" (14826) likely covers both. We can hardly imagine that the British chafe at the English yoke while living happily alongside the Saxons. In the British bishops' complaint against Augustine, we find this split again:

> [Augustine] haueð ifulleȝed þene king, Cantuaren aðeling,
> Aðelbert ihaten, heh inne Anglene.
> And he hafueð ifunden here hundes heðene
> þa comen of Sexlonde mid Gurmunde þan kinge. . . . (14853-6)
> [Augustine has baptized the king, the ruler of Kent,
> Who is called Athelbert, powerful among the English.
> And he has found here, heathen hounds
> Who came from Saxony with Gurmund the king. . . .]

The English and the "hundes heðene" are somehow different people, at least in the British estimation. Curiously, Layamon's retelling of this scene has more in common with Geoffrey than with Wace: where Wace simply records the archbishop's complaint against the "Engleis" (13848), Geoffrey mentions a long discourse explaining "why they hated the Saxons so," and the Britons' feeling that they shared "as much in common with the Angles as they had with dogs!" (266).

Further confusion follows in Cădwan's victory over Ælfric, where "Anglisce and Sexisce" (14954) are killed, in both Layamon and Wace's texts (Wace 13951), but Cadwan is acclaimed king by both "Ænglisce" and "Sexise" (14964) in the English poem and only by "Engleis" (13965) in Wace. The Welsh king Margadud describes the pre-Arthurian Saxons as "Englisce men mid heore ufele craften" (15803), but Oswy and Penda's shared Englishness figures for him in opposition to the Britons, not the Saxons. Further, as Layamon tells us he "Ænglisce men bihehte hærm þene meste" ("threatened great harm to the English"; 15792), so this testimony is suspect. However, his politically

motivated effort to conflate the two groups—possibly implied in Wace though made explicit only by Layamon—may signal some separation between them in Layamon's mind. Can we draw a clear pattern from these changes? Likely not, except to say that the English *Brut* sometimes preserves a vaguely non-English Saxon element! We do see that the extreme distinctions and conflations of the two groups, where they are not found in Wace, are made by the Britons in direct speech and for political reasons. To argue that Augustine baptized both Athelbert, king of the English, and the Saxons amplifies the harm done to the British Christians, while Margadud assigns the guilt for Hengest's actions on Penda and Oswy. In the narrator's own voice, where both labels occur, they are used cooperatively with little real distinction drawn between the groups. These may circulate as separate ethnicities, but their aims are similar.

While the emergence of the "English" may be no more than a new label for a familiar people, that new label is quickly legitimated as more than simply an explanation of origins. In a definite break with Geoffrey and Wace, Layamon imports the story, widely circulated in Old and Middle English literature, of Gregory the Great's exchange with the English slaves in Rome.[12] Kathy Lavezzo's article on Ælfric's use of the story, "Another Country: Ælfric and the Production of English Identity," examines the story's affirmation of the English as a nation while incorporating them into the universal church. Ælfric's Gregory homily, Lavezzo argues, "presents a fantasy of English-Christian belonging," bringing the English into the fold of the Christian Church, yet doing so "by considering the English as ethnic others," geographically and racially set apart from the Rome-centred church (70). As Layamon tells the story, Gregory encounters "of Englisce leoden / þreo swiðe fæire men" ("Three fair men of the English nation"; 14700-1), and

asks them where they are from and why they are in Rome. One of them, "þat wes a swiðe fair mon" ("who was a very fair man"; 14706), answers that they are slaves from England and, if Gregory will free them, they will ask for baptism. Gregory responds with the famous pun,

> Iwis ȝe beoð Ænglisce englen ilicchest
> of all þan folke þa wunieð uppen uolde;
> eouwer cun is feȝerest of alle quike monnen. (14713-5)
> [Certainly, you English are most like angels
> of all people who live on earth;
> your race is fairest of all living men.]

Like Ælfric, Layamon depicts the "aðele iborene" ("nobly born"; 14710) slaves primarily in terms of their physical beauty, who likely gain Gregory's attention through a "specifically English 'racial' and aristocratic masculinity" (Lavezzo 80). While Layamon's version of this story downplays the specific features that account for the English slaves' beauty, his repeated use of "fair" seems quite deliberate. Their beauty, staked specifically to their light skin and hair, produces a likeness to angels that, in Gregory's estimation, makes them particularly receptive to Christianity.

While the slaves' whiteness makes them like angels in the *Brut* as in Ælfric's homily, for readers of the *Brut* it should also recall the coming of Hengest and Horsa, with their "þreo hundred cnihten alse hit weoren kinges" ("Three hundred knights as though they were kings"; 6883). There, too, the nobility and fairness of the Saxons is stressed, as Layamon laments over "þa færeste men þat auere her comen / ah heo weore hæðene—þat wes hærm þa mare" ("the fairest men who had ever come here, but they were heathens—that was a greater harm"; 6885). Hengest is "cnihtene alre fæirest" ("fairest of men"; 6933, 6955, 6967), and, just as in the slave narrative, physical beauty

and nobility are the key markers of ethnic alterity. Layamon founds the Britons' resentment against the Saxons in the fact that the latter "Bett weoren iscrudde and bed weoren iuædde" ("were better clothed, and better fed"; 6978). In this context, Gregory does not reveal an inherent link between the Englishmen's beauty and their virtue; rather, this narrative redeems Anglo-Saxon beauty, producing the link between beauty and virtue. At the same time, Lavezzo argues that the Pope's puns, in Ælfric's text, "suggest that writing and speaking in English, far from constituting a return to an illicit and pagan mode of communication, would signal instead the use of the holy tongue of a special and 'angelic' Christian people" (Lavezzo 89). Certainly, it is tempting to read this as a vindication of Layamon's own choice of English as a literary medium, and he may have been drawn to the story for precisely that reason. But historical research has yet to prove that Layamon's writing in English was particularly radical, rather than merely unusual (Johnson and Wogan-Browne 102). Instead, Gregory effects an elevation of the status of English connected to its newfound legitimacy as a naming language. Layamon's insertion of this story, a papal endorsement of the English language, into his translation of a French text is certainly suggestive. While it would be rash to cast this gesture as "the dogged persistence of an underprivileged language struggling to survive in lean political times" (Salter 36), neither should we dismiss as insignificant the connection drawn in the Gregory narrative between the narrative's rising sympathies towards the English people and Layamon's seeking a place for an English text in the polyglot field of vernacular literature.

In redeeming the English and bringing them into the Christian fold, Augustine undermines the comfortable Christian-heathen binary around which Layamon had

structured the narrative for nearly nine thousand lines. Following on the loss of power behind this opposition, Layamon represents the continued Briton-outsider rift in an increasingly unsympathetic light. The first eruption of what begins to appear as British chauvinism lies in the conflict of the British monks and Augustine over the question of ecclesiastical authority in England. In this final episode of Augustine's mission, Augustine discovers large communities of monks and seven bishops "singende masse" ("celebrating mass"; 14829) in Briton-controlled territory in the North. Augustine sends to the bishops, ordering them to submit to his authority as papal legate and Primate of England. The bishops refuse, citing the authority of their own archbishop at Caerleon, but their real grounds for refusal reveals their betrayal of Christian universalism:

> Cristine we beoð alle and of Cristine cunne,
> and ure elderne swa weoren agan is þreo hundred ȝeren;
> and heo beoð neowene icumen and Cristindom habbeoð undernumen,
> and Austin heom fullehteð and to Gode fuseoð.
> (14859-62; cf. Wace 13852-4)
> [We are all Christians, and of a Christian race,
> and our ancestors were likewise, for three hundred years;
> and they [the English] are newly arrived, and have received Christianity,
> and Augustine baptizes them and turns them to God.]

Of course, Layamon himself has accepted the newly converted English as true Christians, and clearly sympathizes with Augustine, rendered "sarimod and sorhful an heorten" ("sad and sorrowful at heart"; 14868) by this response. Indeed, the British monks' rejection becomes a more targeted personal attack in the English text: where Wace's Britons vow that "tut cil sunt nostre enemi / Par ki Engleis sunt cunverti" ("They are all our enemies, by whom the English are converted"; 13861-2), the Britons in Layamon's text vow "we hine hatiȝen uulleð and heren hine nulleð; / nauere to ure liue no scullen we him wurðen liðe" ("we will hate him and will not obey him; never in our lives

will we befriend him"; 14863-4). We can see Layamon's sympathies shifting by degrees throughout these narratives: the British naming practices lose their untouchable status, the Saxon characteristics are redeemed and reinterpreted in a Christian framework, and the British monks personally attack Augustine, whose authority is sanctioned not only by the Pope, but more directly from God at Cernel. However, through this shift, Layamon does not abandon the Britons, nor assimilate them into the dominant English *leode*.

In the English response to the rejection of Augustine, we see the profound ambivalence in Layamon's late representation of the Britons. While Layamon accepts, even amplifies to a limited extent, the British clergy's transgressions against Augustine, the massacre at Bangor remains regrettable in his telling. The massacre narrative, along with Augustine's encounter with the wicked English at Dorchester, undermines the desired representation of "þe feire Austin þe fulluht broute hider in" ("the fair Augustine who brought baptism here"; 18). Disrupting the smooth work of conversion, these narratives also question the emergent pro-English stance we have identified in the text. Just as the disobedient Britons executed by King Luces destabilized the newly Christian British nation, King Ælfric's massacre of the monks at Bangor troubles the identification of the English as an angelic, Christian people. Augustine reveals the continuing implication of the secular in the religious in bringing his complaint against the Britons to the English King Athelbert, and these secular authorities--Athelbert and Ælfric--mirror the British monks' rejection of a transethnic or transnational Christianity. Layamon's sympathies seem to shift back to the Britons as he writes, "Ne nuste noht Bruttes þere þat balu heom wes ȝiueðe" ("Now the Britons did not know the woe

planned for them"; 14881). The reiteration of Ælfric's epithet, "forcuðest alre kinge" ("wickedest of kings"; 14878, 14903), appears to separate him from the other English kings, but beginning with the massacre narrative Ælfric replaces Athelbert as the predominant, and representative, English king. If Layamon's moral outrage seems weaker than Wace's or Geoffrey's--he lacks an outburst such as "Deus, quel dolur! Deus, quel pechié!" ("God, what pain! God, what sin!"; 13917)--he amplifies Ælfric's treachery to produce a similar effect. The disparity between the British clergy's intentions "þes kinges grið to wilnien for lufe of God seolfne" ("to seek the king's peace out of love for God himself"; 14911) and Ælfric's unsanctioned--"na man hine ne bede" ("no one asked it of him"; 14914)--decision "þat he al þas wolde feollen to þan grunde" ("that he would cut them all to the ground"; 14915) depends on the poem's moral axis remaining stronger than national bias.

The massacre at Bangor begins the rhythm of peace and war between the British and English that patterns the poem's final movement into secure English dominion and British exile, but a texture of shifting alliances confuses, rather than clarifies, the distinctions between British and English. We gain some sense of this in the massacre's immediate aftermath: the British, led by Cadwan, rise up against the English kings, but after a series of battles Cadwan and Ælfric are reconciled with one another. Ælfric, "forcuðest alre kinge" while persecuting the British monks, is rehabilitated as Layamon proclaims, "blisse wes on hireden mid balden þat kingen" ("there was bliss among the followers of those bold kings"; 14998). The close relationship of the two kings is Wace's innovation: the *Historia* continues to malign Ælfric, as he banishes his pregnant wife, who finds a home in Cadwan's court before bearing Edwin. But Layamon expands on

the theme with typical flair, rhyming playfully through this passage, as each king "heold þene oðer deorluker þene broðer" ("considered the other more dear than a brother"; 15002). Similar rhymes appear in ll. 15003, "nomen" with "comen," and 15008, "ibredde" and "iuedde." The British-English distinction collapses here into the uniform "heo," a rhetorical effect similar to the wrestling match between Corineus and Geomagog, but this collapse signals the peace between Cadwan and Ælfric and poses no threat. Indeed, the princes "Heore maines heo uondeden" ("they tested their strength"; 15019), echoing Brutus's decision "to letten fondien of his main stronge" ("to make a trial of his [Geomagog's] great strength"; 930). The joint upbringing of Cadwalan and Edwin provides an ideal of British and English coexistence, and their simultaneous conceptions and births embody the "two kingdoms" model their fathers endorse.

The failure of the two kingdoms model may lie in the too clear distinction it draws between British and English; whatever the case may be, Cadwalan and Edwin's contest for sovereignty destroys that stability and produces a rapid shifting of alliances in the absence of pervasive, consistent national solidarity. In Layamon's poem, the conflict arises over the archbishop's initial refusal to crown either Edwin or Cadwalan and subsequent decision to crown Cadwalan first. This innovation raises, once again, the relationship of episcopal and royal authority, and it sits uneasily alongside the simple fact that "Cadwalan hefde castles swiðe monieȝe, / and þe richedom stod mære on Cadðwalanes hond" ("Cadwalan had many great castles, and the greater kingdom was in Cadwalan's hands"; 15042-3), which provided Wace with ample explanation of their conflict. Certainly, the conflict between British and English Christianity has been resolved with the slaughter of the British clergy, as Layamon sees no irony in the British

king's coronation by the presumably English archbishop of Canterbury. However, tensions between British and English persist, and it is British chauvinism, once again, that brings this tension to open conflict.

In the outbreak of violence, Layamon recounts a discrepancy between both kings and their advisors, to ironic and ultimately pro-English effect. We hear first of Edwin's reaction to Cadwalan's coronation:

> wrað he wes an heorte,
> and seide auere wið and wið: "Ich wulle makıen unfrið,
> and al ic wulle aquellen þat ich quike uinde
> of Cadwaðlanes uolke, ualsest alre monne!" (15060-3)
> [He was wrathful at heart,
> and said over and over "I will wage war,
> and I will kill all those I find living
> of Cadwalan's people, that most false of men!"]

The promised genocide is quickly overcome by the advice of "alle þa wiseste men" (15067) to seek peaceful resolution; throughout this passage, wisdom consists precisely in resisting this violent nationalism. Cadwalan receives Edwin's "wordes wise" (15081) openly, and requests the advice of his own noblemen, but he removes himself from "þa cnihtes wise" (15097) and exposes himself to Brien's nationalism:

> Nu we maȝen wepen mid wanliche iberen,
> halden us for hæne þere we weoren heȝe.
> Nu þu walt underuon þat nauer ær nes idon:
> tweien kinges halden kinehelmes on londen!
> Nuðe we scullen wepen þæ ær richen weoren,
> for wurðscipe ualleð adune þer wes ær wunne. (15116-21)
> [Now we may weap, with bitter lamentation,
> taking ourselves for lowly where once we were noble.
> Now you will undertake what has never before been done:
> Allow two kings to hold kingdoms in the land!
> Now we must weep, who once were as kings,
> for our worth falls, where once we had honour.]

Brien's invocation of the glorious unified British past, in contrast to the bitter future of a divided land clearly trades on nationalist sentiment. Of course, Brien's statement is ironic, coming late in a history composed largely of wars and divided kingships in Britain, but it suffices to win over Cadwalan. The exposure given to these manipulations contrasts with the glorification of British unity seen earlier in the narrative, and Layamon here seems more unforgiving of this rhetoric than earlier. The consequences of Edwin and Cadwalan's battles are felt most keenly by "þan beondes þa on londe wuneden" ("the farmers, who lived off the land"; 15152).

There is a further irony in Brien's exhortation to a purely British dominion over the land: the conflicts which follow produce precisely the opposite effect. While national solidarity surfaces in Cadwallan's flight to Brittany and the support of the Breton king, Salemon, "an heorte him weore þe selere for heo weoren isibbe" ("it was easier on his heart, for they were kinsmen"; 15240), the more prevalent alliances are contingent, rooted in convenience or necessity and transgressing ethnic boundaries. The career of the English king Penda is telling. Introduced as king of Mercia, Penda "lufde Edwine, Edwine lufde hine" ("loved Edwin, and Edwin loved him"; 15442), but once captured by Cadwalan in fighting at Exeter, "he wolde bicumen his mon, his monscipe hæhȝen / dæiȝes and nihtes, he and al his cnihtes" ("he would become [Cadwalan's] man, uphold his honour day and night, he and all his followers"; 15491-2). The transfer of loyalty is negotiated in detail between Penda's messenger and Cadwalan, and the transaction is secured with Penda's "hende" ("beautiful"; 15516) sister, Helene. Helene is promised as the vehicle through whom Cadwalan will secure "lufe of hire cunnen, / and iwinnen al þi

kinelond to þire aȝere hond" ("the loyalty of her race, and win the entire kingdom to [his own] hand"; 15523-4). With the death of Edwin, Cadwalan does win the entire kingdom, though it has nothing to do with love, arising after "al þa ferde wes ofslaȝen" ("the whole army was slaughtered"; 15601). Significantly, after his victory at Hatfield, the Briton Cadwalan is proclaimed "king ouer Anglen" ("king of the English"; 15614), and the Englishman Penda is reduced to one of his subordinates. Penda's Englishness never disappears, and he must continually battle the English opposition to Cadwalan's rule. While he gains the epithet, "swikelest alre kinge" ("most treacherous of kings"; 15673) through his opposition to Oswald, this seems to derive less from his shifting allegiances than from his treatment of Saint Oswald, "þe a murðe wes aquald" ("who by murder lost his life"; 15688).

Bonds of kinship and nationality are further disrupted through the instability Oswy's rebellion brings to the Northern kingdom, and to the stable coexistence of the English and British under Cadwalan. Oswy, Oswald's only brother, quickly turns on the chieftains who elected him king, purging the land North of the Humber, "þat þer wes nan to laue of þan þe him weoren laðe" ("so that no one remained of those who hated him"; 15713). The violent production of a unified kingdom drives these exiled chieftains first to Penda, and then to Cadwalan's parliament. The Southern parliament offers a different model of unity from the Northern tyranny:

> Þider comen kinges and æc here-þringes,
> þider comen eorles, þider comen beornes,
> biscpes þider comen and boc-ilerede men,
> riche and hene, þider heo comen alle,
> alches cunnes leoden þa þene king lufeden. . . . (15739-43)
> [There came kings and also chieftains,

There came earls and warriors,
Bishops came there and book-learned men,
Rich and poor, they all came there,
People of every race who loved the king. . . .]

As Penda rises to speak, he adds another pairing to this roster: "Englisce and Bruttisce" (15751), confirming Cadwalan's status as king of the English, a unity suggesting at the popular level what existed at a royal level in the childhood of Edwin and Cadwalan through the two kingdoms model. But a strong British nationalism again emerges to disrupt this coexistence when Margadud urges Cadwalan to turn Penda and Oswy on one another since they are both English, and since either outcome would be beneficial to the British: "leten heore whelpes whæruen heom bisides, / elc oðer quelle, þat þer nan quic no leue" ("let their whelps turn on one another, each killing the other until none are left living" (15814-5). At this last disruption, Layamon takes his strongest stance on behalf of the English, declaring King Margadud to be of "monnen . . . ȝeomerist, / for auere he Ænglisce men bihehte hærm þene meste" ("the most accursed of men, for he always sought the greatest harm for English men"; 15791-2).

The battle between Penda and Oswy produces Margadud's desired results, but the British have no opportunity to reassert their dominance over the island. Indeed, as the plague ravages the island during the reign of Cadwalan's son, Cadwalader, Layamon expands on a passage from Wace (14681-4) to produce a perverse echo of the gathering of Cadwalan's parliament:

quelen þa eorles, quelen þa beornes,
quelen þa þeines, quelen þa sweines,
quelen þa lareden, quelen þa leouweden,

quelen þa ældren, quelen þa eongeren,
quelæn þa wifmen, quelen þa wanclen. . . . (15887-91)

> [Earls and barons died,
> thanes and warriors died,
> the learned and the lewd died
> the old and the young died
> the women and the children died. . . .]

We might add to this, the English and the British died, for this plague and the repopulation with a new wave of Saxon migrants cements the change of dominion over England. The arrival of Athelstan from Saxony produces the first English kingdom ruling the entire island: "Þis wes þe formeste Englisce mon þe al Ænglelond biwon" (15944), Layamon proclaims. As Lesley Johnson notes,

> in Laȝamon's account of the reign of King Athelstan . . . the ordering and peacekeeping achievements of the king are emphasised and the impression of cultural disruption which is conveyed in the *Roman de Brut* through a sequnce of renaming (14739-56) is played down in the corresponding sections of Laȝamon's work. ("Reading" 156)

Viewed in this way, Cadwalader's prophetic dream does not produce the Britons' exile into Wales; it merely confirms what population shifts and stable law-making have wrought. The dream, in which "a wunder ane fair mon" ("a wondrously fair man"; 16007) tells Cadwalader that the Britons shall never again rule over England, does not suggest that this loss consists of a divine punishment. The young man assures Cadwalader, "Crist þe haueð deore" ("you are dear to Christ"; 16009), and the Britons' final loss of all but Wales is mournful.

The final movement of Laȝamon's *Brut* consistently frustrates our efforts to map its political leanings and sympathies. The emergence of the English nation has none of the certainty that marked the Britons' emergence under the strong leadership of Brutus and Corineus. The passage of dominion is marked in several ways, but a British presence

persists on the island even in the poem's final lines. The English people emerge as a group liberated from the guilt of the pagan Saxons through Pope Gregory's reclamation of their language and beauty as signs of potential Christian virtue. Despite this initiation into the universal Christian church, their first action after their national baptism is to slaughter the British clergy and establish the Canterbury-centred English hierarchy. National affiliations, a source of tremendous strength in the *Brut*'s early history, become contingent on more pragmatic considerations. Especially on the British side, the people's history is selectively remembered and the communal memory seems personified in the chauvinist Brien and Margadud. If any political motivations may be extracted from this mess, we may find them with reference to Brien and Margadud's efforts. Laȝamon's text works to reiterate and remember the divisions and ambiguities that mar the island's "real" history, undermining such glorious, manipulative histories.

Conclusion

While the observations made in Chapter 3 complicate the picture of nationalism I built in Chapter 1, they do not require us to dismiss that picture altogether. E.G. Stanley offers a tremendous understatement when he suggests that "The *Brut* is not the homogeneous work it appears to be at first sight" (23), but neither should we read the *Brut* as an entirely heterogeneous, incoherent mass. The emergence of the English in the closing movement depends quite deliberately on the emergence of the British in the opening movement, as the narrative resists Brien and Margadud's erasure of historical processes through which nations are formed. Layamon reveals the idyllic pasts summoned by the British chauvinists, in which the nation is devoid of internal strife and exists seemingly without beginning, to be no more than politically expedient fantasies. Perhaps the greatest blow to the portrait of Layamon as an English nationalist, resisting the Norman conquerors, is that his own history is anything but expedient. Instead, Layamon's text ends on a sorrowful note, mourning the fading of British dominion even as it celebrates the restoration Athelstan brings to the nation, through new laws and reconciliation with the church.

Critics of nationalism, whether in its medieval or modern forms, characterize the function of nationalist histories as producing an ideal past in order to sustain the nation in the present moment. Thus, Kathleen Davis writes that Alfred's *Preface*

> not only posits the nation as a preexisting, homogeneous entity, but also authorizes the contemporary nation in terms of *apparently* intrinsic, timeless characteristics, such as the composition of its people, its geographical boundaries, its laws, values, and political structure. (622)

History in Layamon's *Brut* is likewise taken up with the composition of the nation's people and the establishment of boundaries and laws; we have already seen how Athelstan's claim to the kingship over all of England is secured through a stress on the stable political structures he can produce. However, not only were these characteristics of the nation well into the process of being replaced by Norman institutions as Layamon was writing, but neither does he imagine them as timeless or intrinsic to the English as a people. If anything, Layamon's motivations appear anti-nationalist. He undermines the recollection and use of a glorious English past as a weapon against Norman rule, characterizing that past by tension and upheaval in the place of stability and unity.

As an exercise in uncovering the process through which the nation is artificially constructed, the *Brut* appears analogous to the work of contemporary critics of nationalism in their exposition of the gaps and inconsistencies of nationalist discourse. Layamon's apparent lack of nationalist affection need not reflect on the absence of nations in his view of the world and its history; a number of critics, including Benedict Anderson, reject personal attachments to nationalism without denying the political relevance of nations. The complexity of the cultural groupings Layamon develops, even as they nearly dissolve into contingency and ambiguity, strongly recommends the language of "nation-ness." Under the analysis of Homi Bhabha, the modern nation appears to be anything but simple. Bhabha, writing of the relationship between the people and the nation, argues that the former

> represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the "social" as homogeneous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population. (146)

These two impulses accurately describe the dynamic of the people in the final movement: summoned together to parliament under one king, yet unequally addressed once there, revealing the incomplete disappearance of English-Briton distinctions. By the end of the poem, the threat has metamorphosed from the resemblance of the Britons to Geomagog or Hamun, to the imposition of a rhetoric of historical difference on peoples who, as Christians, have the potential for unity.

No satisfactory answer accounts for this shift in the direction of the threat against nationalism, just as the Galfridian history provides no satisfactory answer to this new threat. Layamon resolves this threat only by a plague that, as we have noted, produces through death the equality that escaped the powers of the living at Cadwalan's parliament. The note of ambivalence and mourning that emerges in the *Brut*'s final lines--"Þa ȝet ne com þæs ilke dæi, beo heonneuorð alse hit mæi; / iwurðe þet iwurðe iwurðe Godes wille" ("The day has not yet come [when the Britons will reclaim the island?] whatever may yet be; come what may, God's will be done"; 16094-5)--offers but a weak hope, against the pessimism that otherwise marks the end of this history. The *Brut* remains worth reading primarily because it presents evidence of conflicted and conflicting efforts to produce identities; the narrative of progress, in which the Middle Ages figure only as the Modern's cast-off infancy, is profoundly disrupted by this evidence. These conflicts are no closer to resolution now than they were for Layamon, eight hundred years ago.

Notes

[1] The essays contained in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages* (1995) and *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (2000) provide additional examples of such explorations.

[2] According to Madden's half-verse numbering system, as used by the *MED*: 2a, vv. 359, 3268, 6863, 9482, 24642, 25519; 2c, vv. 1865, 2059, 2914, 4634, 5685, 6025, 6627, 6674, 6839, 7110, 7459, 9121, 12942, 14553, 15212, 15499, 15511, 15757, 16540-1, 20722, 22168, 22976, 25452, 26297, 26384, 29346, 30609; 3, v. 25083.

[3] Translations are my own, though I have consulted both the parallel translations provided in Barron and Weinberg's edition of the *Brut*, along with Donald G. Bzydyl's translation. I have preferred a more literal translation than these. Barron and Weinberg, particularly, introduce a greater lexical variety, obscuring the deliberately repetitive nature of Layamon's own words.

[4] Throughout, I refer to characters across all three texts by the names given in the English *Brut*. Where that spelling is inconsistent, I rely on standard names used by Weinberg and Barron in their translation.

[5] Wace has either corrected this error, or followed a manuscript that omitted the line. Albion is not called empty in the *Roman*. In either case, Diana prophesies to Layamon's Brutus that the land is inhabited by giants, but not by any legitimate people: "ah leode ne beoð þar nane" ("but no nation [is there]"; 624).

6 The Britons' initial heathenism is quite problematic both to Layamon's history and to the attempt (by Wickham-Crowley and others) to centre the poem on the Britons as an ancient Christian people. I consider this subject at greater length in Chapter Two.

7 Allowing that *Imagined Communities* was initially published before the rise of American Moral Majority-style politics, the decision to ignore the religion/nation exchange (in both modern and medieval periods) remains problematic.

8 La prophetie que cil dist
Fu entre Bretuns recordee;
De lunc tens ne fu obliee. (Wace 4870-2)
[The prophecy that he gave
Was recorded by the Britons
And not forgotten for a long time.]

9 Certainly, a chosen people need not be a perfect people. The paradigmatic chosen people in the Biblical tradition are far more abusive towards their prophets than are Layamon's Britons, and they show a similar pattern of recurrent idolatry. Points of connection between the Britons in the Galfridian tradition and the Israelites abound and could easily sustain a lengthy study of their own.

10 And of course, both these authors are aware of the trope's Old Testament lineage.

11 As far as concerns Wace, his self-identification is clearly with the French. Thus, "E nus or Lundres l'apelum" ("And we call it Lundres";1238). Ample evidence exists to reject reading Wace as a representative of "the sophisticated ruling Norman

elite" against Layamon's "less polished, more popular, oppressed English people" (Johnson and Wogan-Browne 102). On the other hand, neither does Wace appear to participate in the "developing sense of Englishness" some have seen in his contemporaries, Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury (Gillingham 88).

12 "The legend first appears in two eighth-century texts: the anonymous Whitby writer's life of Gregory (c.707-14) and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. It is found later in Paul the Deacon's late eighth-century life of Gregory, and the Old English translation of Bede (c.871-99). Ælfric's sermon on Gregory (c. 994) draws upon Bede, Paul, and the Old English Bede; and forms part of the monk's two-volume series of *Catholic Homilies*" (Lavezzo 72). It is also found in the *South English Legendary*, from which Barron and Weinberg suggest Layamon drew it (891n.757).

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